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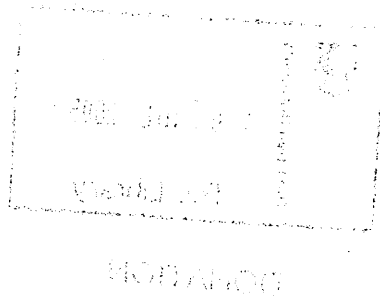
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**A study of the dialogue
between
Christianity and *Theravāda* Buddhism in Thailand**

as represented by Buddhist and Christian writings from Thailand
in the period 1950 – 2000.



A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Religious Studies
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December 2007

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ABSTRACT

There has been little Buddhist-Christian dialogue in Thailand. Thai Buddhists, the majority community, see little need for dialogue. There are, however, two notable exceptions: the Venerable Payutto and the Venerable Buddhādāsa Bhikkhus.

Thai Christians do not realise the importance of dialogue, hence Dialogue has been confined to a few Thai scholars. Historical study has shown that the first Christian emissaries from the West arrived with superior attitudes and hidden agendas, not troubling to understand Buddhism, nor its social context. Their efforts led to a lack of acceptance, even disdain, for Christianity. Thai Christians have not grasped the need to understand *Theravāda* Buddhism, as this dissertation uncovers, and without realising, they are communicating with Buddhists using Thai vocabulary that is incomprehensible.

Buddhādāsa took a very significant initiative to dialogue with Thai Christians. Through his use of two levels of understanding language, Buddhādāsa reformulates key Buddhist doctrines. In particular his explication of *nibbāna*, not at or beyond death, but for all in the here-and-now via *jitwang* (freed-mind) and detachment from I/me-my/mine gives Buddhism contemporary relevance. Buddhādāsa compares his Buddhism to what he sees as the main features of Christianity. ‘God’ he identifies with the Buddhist concept of *dhamma*; *nibbāna* with ‘the kingdom of God’; and *anattā* with the Christian cross, perceiving it as ‘the denial of I’. Payutto’s exposition is more cautious, by contrast. It reflects Buddhist suspicions of historical Christianity and points to the urgency of dialogue.

This dissertation uncovers the weaknesses and strengths of Thai Buddhist-Christian dialogue as it now stands, giving the big picture and uncovering the underlying issues for further research. It provides the crucial groundwork necessary for future work and stresses the need to dialogue and to enter each others’ worldview to overcome the problem of miscommunication through incomprehension. Only thus can fruitful dialogue leading to mutual understanding and social harmony be achieved.

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My thesis is dedicated to the memories of my Great Grandfather Revd. Boon Tuan Boon-Itt and my Grandfather Bentoon Boon-Itt M.D. two outstanding Thai Christians who have greatly inspired me.

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Introduction

Today's world has made significant advances in technology. Peoples and ideas move around the world freely and at high speed. Communities worldwide are becoming more and more multi-faith and multi-cultural. In this global situation people need to learn to live together and understand each others' worldviews. Without the appropriate mechanisms to cope with the diverse interpretations, value systems and priorities within communities, misunderstandings and conflicts will inevitably develop and eventually erupt in various forms and degrees of unrest. Before the event of the 'Twin Towers' in New York on September 11th, 2001, a sign of great conflicts erupting, Hans Küng wrote:

No peace among the nations,
without peace among the religions

No peace among the religions,
without dialogue between the religions

No dialogue between the religions,
without investigation of the foundations of the religions.¹

Dialogue is one of the mechanisms available to help people with different worldviews to understand each other. Dialogue is an important tool in conflict avoidance and resolution. Moreover, in the investigation of the foundations of the religions, it is crucial to understand the various facets of religious expression in terms of the goals of life and the avoidance of discord. Religion encompasses all of life and people emphasise the various aspects of religion differently.² Ninian Smart categorizes these as practice and ritual, experience and emotion, narrative and myth, doctrine and philosophy, ethics and

¹ Küng (1995), Frontispiece, 783.

² Failure to grasp the many facets of religion can be observed in the United Kingdom today. Politicians misunderstand Islam and its all embracing nature, their religion governing food, dress, education and laws. Christianity should also embrace the whole of life but in many people's minds is reduced to mere church going.

prescription, societal and institutional, and material factors.³ Whereas western commentators tend to stress the doctrinal and ethical components of religion, in Asia the emphasis is usually much more on experience, ritual and prescriptive social behaviour.⁴

Theravāda Buddhism is the major religion in Thailand with ninety-four percent of the population stating Buddhism as their religion.⁵ Recognising the significance of a person's religion, it has been added to Thai identity cards since 2000. Christianity though only 0.8% of the population, has an influence beyond its statistical presence. This has come about largely through the missionary's contribution to modernizing Thailand.⁶ To promote peace and minimize conflict, the need is to understand each other's worldviews and to see what has happened, is happening and could happen in the dialogue between Thai Christianity and Thai Buddhism.

The purpose of this thesis is to analyse the dialogue which has taken place between Buddhists and Christians in Thailand in order to identify the possibilities and difficulties involved, and to suggest ways forward for future dialogue. In this process the concepts of *nibbāna* and the kingdom of God, the goal of life for Buddhists and Christians respectively, will be used as examples of key themes to be considered.⁷ The focus is on what has been written by Thai scholars in the half-century 1950 – 2000.

³ Smart in Bowker (1997), xxiv.

⁴ Gosling (2001), 6.

⁵ Muslim 4.6 % and Christians 0.8 % (Roman Catholics and Protestants): 2000 census, National Statistical Office.

⁶ See chapter two and chapter six.

⁷ This thesis is not fundamentally about definitions of *nibbāna* and the kingdom of God, nor does it pursue an in depth theological or philosophical inquiry, but it examines the terms' implications for dialogue.

The thesis brings together various pieces of the jigsaw: the historical back drop⁸, the key partners to dialogue – how they understand their own religions⁹ and how they perceive their counterparts, and the works of other researchers. It forms an overview of the big picture and uncovers the underlying issues for further research. Hence, this thesis provides the fundamental groundwork, which has long been overlooked, necessary for future work on Thai Buddhist-Christian dialogue.¹⁰

This thesis consists of four parts. The examination of the historical background in part one provides understanding of the political, doctrinal and social dimensions of dialogue before considering the two partners to the dialogue: Thai *Theravāda* Buddhism in part two, and Christianity in part three. Part four draws the two sides of the dialogue together and points to how the dialogue may be carried forward.

Part One: Setting the scene, outlines the religious history of Thailand, important for understanding the present as well as for providing guidelines for the future. What Buddhism means in Thailand today is considered, followed by a historical overview - in particular the Buddhist reformation of the late 19th and early 20th century, and some current expressions of Thai Buddhism: State Buddhism, Radical Buddhism, and Folk Buddhism. The development of Christianity in Thailand, the Roman Catholics (*kristang* คริสตัง) and Protestants (*kristian* คริสเตียน) is then traced.¹¹ Next we review the history of Christian inter-religious dialogue in particular Thai Buddhist-Christian dialogue, and principles to be observed when undertaking dialogue.

⁸ For further reading on how historical events impact Buddhist-Christian dialogue see Schmidt-Leukel, Köberlin & Götz (2001), 13 -20.

⁹ For Thai Buddhist understanding of *nibbāna* and Thai Christian understanding of the kingdom of God which are both fundamental to informed dialogue, see appendices two and six respectively.

¹⁰ To date, very little work has been done on this subject (it will become clear as the thesis unfolds).

¹¹ In Thailand Christianity is perceived as consisting of the Roman Catholics and the non-Roman Catholics which, for Thais, are the Protestants. In government statistics *kris* is used for all. Roman Catholics in this thesis are simply called the Catholics.

Part Two: Buddhists in dialogue - a closer look considers the Buddhist side. There are two well known Thai *Bhikkhus*¹² whose expositions of Buddhism are highly influential:¹³

The two most outstanding interpreters of Buddhism in Thailand over the past twenty-five years are Phra-dhammapitaka¹⁴ and Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu. The status of Buddhadāsa in Thai society, compared with Phra-dhammapitaka, is a unique one. Phra-dhammapitaka is a scholar, while Buddhadāsa is something beyond that designation. Undoubtedly, both are regarded as great Buddhist thinkers of today. Their knowledge of Buddhist doctrine is seen as authoritative.¹⁵

The Venerable Buddhadāsa *Bhikkhu* and the Venerable Payutto *Bhikkhu* are simply referred to as Buddhadāsa and Payutto respectively with no intention of being disrespectful. Buddhadāsa, recently deceased, interpreted *Theravāda* doctrine making it relevant to modern life. He also entered into dialogue with Christianity and was convinced of the need for religions to understand one another. He had discussions with Hans Küng, a Catholic and also a great believer in the need for inter-religious harmony. Buddhadāsa's work in reform and dialogue is examined in detail in chapter four, followed by Payutto's explanation of Buddhism for Thai society and his perception of Christianity in chapter five. Attention is drawn to similarities, parallels and contrasts between Christian and *Theravāda* doctrines. Payutto's scholarly works provide a systematic Buddhist framework for society in economics and politics as well as religion in this twenty-first century, strengthening the relevancy of Buddhism to modern life.¹⁶ The study of Payutto gives useful insights into the urgency and necessity for dialogue.

¹² Buddhist monk.

¹³ Falvey (2002), 16.

¹⁴ Phra-dhammapitaka (พระธรรมปิฎก) is one honorific clerical title for Payutto who is also known by other clerical titles: Phra-sriwisutthimolee (พระศรีวิสุทธิโมลี), Phra-rajawaramuni (พระราชาธรรมนิ), Phra-debvedi (พระเทพเวที), Phra-promkunaporn (พระพรหมคุณาภรณ์).

¹⁵ Swearer and Promta (2000), 21-22.

¹⁶ In contrast with Christians in Thailand who have generally neglected the social dimensions of their faith.

Theravāda Buddhist scriptures are written in *Pali*. As this thesis concerns *Theravāda* Buddhism, the *Pali* terms (e.g. *nibbāna* and *kamma*), will be used, except when quoting from scholars using Sanskrit. A glossary of frequently used *Pali* and Thai terms employed in this thesis is appended.¹⁷

Part Three: Christians in dialogue - a closer look, considers the Christian side, beginning with an examination of Thai Christians' responses to Buddhism available to date, followed by an assessment of Thai Christian understanding of the kingdom of God and views on dialogue. A survey of Thai church leaders' views reveals several thought-provoking results. The Catholic leaders' answers were, unsurprisingly, standard Catholic theology. The Protestant leaders showed less depth of theological reflection. How far they are or are not in sympathy with the need for dialogue is assessed. Finally, the possibilities for developing a Thai Christian response to Buddhism and how it might be enlarged in the light of Christian theology are considered. All Bible quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) unless otherwise stated.

Part Four: The dialogue - Buddhist and Christian goals compared, summarizes the key findings and the way forward. Here we consider how one can be led along the path of dialogue, trying to reflect impartially the two sides to the conversation, reviewing how far and in what directions this research has corrected and developed one's views. It proposes to continue the dialogue started by Buddhādāsa with the aim of building bridges for mutual understanding between the two religions. It provides a useful overview of what has happened, along with an insightful theological discussion. Realizing that the work here is merely a small contribution and that significantly more remains to be done, hopefully many will carry forward the dialogue and be effective bridge-builders for the common

¹⁷ Terms referred to only once are explained in the text.

good of our fellow human beings.¹⁸ The whole learning experience is related to the furtherance of mutual understanding to the benefit of both Buddhists and Christians and to increasing the possibility of Thailand remaining an oasis of relative freedom and peaceful coexistence.

Sources

Research is based primarily on written sources and, as far as possible, Thai sources. Quotations from Thai sources, unless otherwise indicated, are the author's translation. The bibliography indicates which books have been published in English. Where there are both Thai and English versions the Thai mostly have been used. Non-Thai readers should be alerted to the fact that in looking at Buddhism in Thailand, references to the Thai monarchs are unavoidable. Sources critical of or commenting on the monarch or monarchy are written almost exclusively by non-Thais because of the laws of *lèse-majesté*.¹⁹ For the reader's convenience, references to the various books of the *Tipiṭaka* are not abbreviated. In addition to printed sources, questionnaires posted to Christian Thai leaders and personal interviews have been used.²⁰ Significantly, the author is most honoured and grateful to the Venerable Payutto who kindly read and commented on his understanding of the *Theravāda* position and worldview. The Venerable Payutto's gracious reply and the comments he gave were encouraging. It can be said with some

¹⁸ Key areas for further study would include: To explore the relevance of Buddhist Christian dialogue elsewhere for use in the Thai context; To further develop the way in which Christian teaching should be presented in the Thai context; To assess whether Thai Buddhist criticisms of Christianity are valid, or how Thai Christianity may be reinterpreted and presented to avoid such critiques; To consider to what extent a contextual enculturation of the Christian gospel in Thai Buddhist culture is an enhancement of its meaning or a distortion of its essence; Whether it is possible to separate either a transmissible essence of Buddhism from its Thai culture, or of the essence of the Christian gospel from its Hebraic, Greek, and European cultures; and to what extent dialogue should lead to a development or reinterpretation of either faith.

¹⁹ For detail see Handley (2006), 7-8. (This book is banned in Thailand.)

²⁰ E.g. Sulak Sivaraksa, Wan Petchsongkram, Cherdchai Lertjitlekha, and Prasit Pongudom were interviewed.

confidence that this thesis has not unsuccessfully understood a scholarly strand of Thai Buddhism.²¹

²¹ In this thesis, this strand is termed radical Buddhism.

Part One: Setting the scene for the *Theravāda* Buddhist - Christian dialogue

Chapter One: Buddhism in Thailand

A survey of what Buddhism means in Thailand today is followed by a brief historical overview showing the close relationship between Buddhism and the monarchy. The reformation of Buddhism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is considered by looking at the *sangha* and its government, followed by the doctrinal development within the *sangha*, specifically the drift towards *lokiyadhamma* and the return of *lokuttaradhamma*. Current Thai *Theravāda* Buddhism: state, radical, and folk are then discussed. This is the background to the work of Buddhādāsa and Payutto, and is vital for an understanding of modern Thai Buddhism.

1.1. What Buddhism means in Thailand today

Buddhism has been and still is recognized as the key institution in the social and political life of Thailand. According to Suksamran:¹

Buddhism is an important social institution, which gives meaning to and is a symbol of national unity. Buddhism is the source and vehicle for passing on the nation's culture and traditions. In short, Buddhism is the root of the Thai nation and the original source of the Thai national identity; socially, culturally, and politically.²

¹ Former Professor of the department of Political Science Chulalongkorn University Bangkok.

² Suksamran (1984), 4.

In Thailand, traditional Buddhist teaching positions one in the order of being - as animal, human or *devada* – as well as determining one's rank in society. Thai Buddhist cosmology is hierarchical, the situations of entities being governed by the law of *kamma*.

Since the Sukhothai period³ this *kammic* view of human existence has been used first by the Thai kings of successive dynasties, and today to support the various organs of the democratic state. The importance of the *sangha* to society has grown and developed until the welfare of *sangha* and state are seen as so closely interwoven that the security of the one is essential to the other,⁴ or in the words of protesting monks in 2002, 'No Buddhism - No Thai Nation'.⁵

By comparison, in England there is currently concern about the disestablishment of the Church of England and in particular about the patronage and role of government in the selection of clergy for higher ranks. However, in the United Kingdom the concern is not for the fabric of the state but for the status of religion.

A period as a *bhikkhu* is the norm for most Thai men; it is a stage in life rather than a lifetime commitment. Boys may be ordained *nain* (novices) at a very young age.⁶ Payutto attributes this custom to the example of the monarchs of the early Ayutthaya

³ Periods in Thai History:

<i>Era</i>	<i>Capital</i>	<i>Dates</i>
Sukhothai (สุโขทัย)	Sukhothai (สุโขทัย)	1219 – 1438/1350
Ayutthaya (อยุธยา)	Ayutthaya (อยุธยา)	1350 – 1767
Thaksin (ตากสิน)	Thonburi (ธนบุรี)	1767 - 1782
Rattanakosin (รัตนโกสินทร์)	Bangkok (กรุงเทพฯ)	1782 – the present

⁴ Jackson (1989), 1.

⁵ Bangkok Post Sept 20 & 21, 2002.

⁶ Tambiah (1970), 97.

period.⁷ A monk studies the Pali canon⁸, learns sections of it by rote, then teaches and expounds Buddhist principles to lay people. He also, and most importantly, demonstrates and exemplifies the Buddha's teaching by his lifestyle.⁹ In general the *sangha* is held in high esteem, and a Thai man who has never been ordained a monk, even for a few weeks, does not receive the same respect for his maturity as a man who has.

The laity depends on the *sangha* too, for reasons other than its primary role, the transmission of the Buddha's teaching. The *bhikkhus*, like Christian monks in the west, have been depended on for teaching in their communities.¹⁰ The monks were regarded as the principal teachers and the *wat* was the major educational institution where both religious and secular subjects were taught.¹¹ Births, marriages and especially deaths rarely pass without the aid of monks in giving advice and blessings.¹²

Revered monks were awarded honorific titles by the King on the advice of the Department of Religious Affairs which was within the Ministry of Education.¹³ Currently the Thai government faces problems when proposing changes in the Buddhist order as the monks have become more political, and reformers and conservatives are more evenly matched. Controversy amongst Buddhist ecclesiastics is seen as dangerous to the State. Colonel Thongkhao, senior Thai minister under the post-Thaksin government, whose views reflect those of senior monks in the Ecclesiastic Council, said 'This confrontation damages our religious unity and *national security*' (the author's

⁷ Payutto (2001), 27.

⁸ The *Tipitaka*, see appendix two.

⁹ Suksamran (1977), 5.

¹⁰ Payutto (2001), 137.

¹¹ Suksamran (1977), 11.

¹² But the monks in Thailand are not entrusted as the state's representatives to register marriages, etc.

¹³ Today the Department of Religious Affairs, which deals with all religions, is within the remit of the later established Ministry of Culture and not the Ministry of Education as it previously was.

italics).¹⁴ After an unprecedented monks' protest in September 2002 the then Prime Minister, Thaksin Shinawatt, upbraided the protestors saying,

As Buddhists they should know *Dhamma* says nothing can be owned or controlled. They should not cling to their 'egos' or other attachments.

Buddhism teaches people to let go. Anyone involved in this protest should abandon their 'selves'.¹⁵

Over the centuries, Thailand has been squeezed between competing powers: from the east, the Khmer and the French, and from the west by the Burmese and the British.¹⁶ Throughout, the country has been defined by the monarchy and Buddhism.

1.2 Historical Overview¹⁷

The country now known as Thailand was acknowledged as a Buddhist country at the time of King Ramkamhaeng or Phohkhunsriindraditya (1275 – 1317) of the Sukhothai era.¹⁸ King Ramkamhaeng sent monks to Sri Lanka for training and in 1360 his grandson, King Li-Thai, invited a Singhalese monk to Sukhothai to preside over an ordination ceremony for Thai monks. Today's Thai monks are able to claim orthodox descent for their ordination going right back to Mahinda and the Sri Lankan Buddhist Council of circa.70BCE.¹⁹ This, referred to as the third Buddhist Council, marks the beginning of the major streams associated with *Theravāda* and *Mahāyāna* Buddhism.²⁰

¹⁴ Bangkok Post April 4, 2002.

¹⁵ Bangkok Post Sept 20, 2002.

¹⁶ Thailand never became a colony. See Tuck (1995); chapter two, footnote 15; and appendix one: Map of Siam a) 1880 and b) since 1909 showing the Loss of Thai Territory to the French and British.

¹⁷ The 'official' Thai history is being presented here. This thesis does not attempt detailed discussion of current debate among historians.

¹⁸ Bechert and Gombrich (1991), 159 ; Payutto (2001), 26.

¹⁹ Shin (1990), 30.

²⁰ See William and Tribe (2000), Harvey (2002), 73-94, Burnett (1996), 60-75 and Harris (2001), 69-70.

King Li-Thai held the classical Buddhist worldview with its tiers of various realms:²¹ heavens, human, ghosts, animal, and hells, as recorded in the *Traibhumikatha*. A core part of this work was in support of the monarchy. The great models were the ideal *Cakkavatti* king and the historical King Asoka (273 – 232 BCE).

After the sack of Ayutthaya by the Burmese in 1767 the Thai capital moved first to Thonburi under King Taksin and then to Bangkok with King Rama I, the first of the Chakri dynasty.²² He undertook the reform of the *sangha* by enacting new *sangha* laws and sponsored a revision of King Li-Thai's *Traibhumikatha*.²³

Influence from Western ideas, especially western science, came in the reign of King Rama IV (Mongkut). Before ascending the throne he had been a monk for twenty-seven years.²⁴ As a monk-prince, he worked to establish textually accurate Pali collections of the *tipiṭaka*;²⁵ to re-establish monastic discipline; and to introduce preaching in Thai rather than Pali. He created a reformed group of monks, the strict *Thammayut nikaya*, distinct from the majority, or the *Mahanikaya*.²⁶ Today *Thammayut* and *Mahanikaya* monks may be distinguished administratively but not doctrinally. Mongkut's son, King

²¹ Thirty-one levels in three spheres: Immaterial, Fine Material and Sense desire.

²² THE CHAKRI DYNASTY

	BE	CE
King Rama I : Buddhayodfa the Great	2325 – 2352	1782 – 1809
II : Buddhaloetla	2352 – 2367	1809 – 1824
III : Nangklao	2367 – 2394	1824 – 1851
IV : Chomklaw (Mongkut)	2394 – 2411	1851– 1868
V : Chulalongkorn, Peya the Great,	2411 – 2453	1868 – 1910
VI : Mongkutklaw (Vajiravudh)	2453 – 2468	1910 – 1925
VII : Prajadhipok	2468 – 2477	1925 – 1934
VIII : Anandamahidol	2477 – 2489	1935 – 1946
IX : Bhumiboladulyadej, the Great,	2489 – the present	1946 – the present.

²³ Tambiah (1976), 183.

²⁴ Bechert and Gombrich (1991), 160.

²⁵ Tambiah (1976), 212.

²⁶ Suksamran (1977), 26 ; Bechert and Gombrich (1991), 160.

Chulalongkorn founded what are now the two Buddhist universities of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya and Mahamakutarajavidyalaya.²⁷

In 1932, there was a revolution which replaced the absolute monarchy with a constitutional one. The *sangha* then came under the civil government, which continued with Buddhism as the national religion.²⁸ The Thai *sangha*, unlike the Burmese, has remained largely apolitical.

1.3 The reformation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries

The *sangha* and doctrine are examined in terms of their development and how they have influenced modern Thai Buddhism. This will enhance the appreciation of Buddhādāsa's and Payutto's work.

1.3.1 The Sangha and its Government

Buddhist teachings uphold the state:

...by describing each person's place in the social hierarchy as being determined by the impersonal law of moral retribution or *kamma*, Buddhism provided a common intellectual and cultural identity for the Thai people that encouraged collective allegiance to the social and political order.²⁹

Since *kamma* rules everyone's situation and is acknowledged by all, there is political and social cohesiveness.

²⁷ Payutto (2001), 18 ; Suksamran (1977), 26.

²⁸ Payutto (2001), 29-30.

²⁹ Jackson (1989), 2.

The interpretation of the Buddha's teachings, the religious practices of both the ordained monks and the lay people, and the administration of the order of Buddhist monks have all been subject to a continual process of reappraisal and restructuring.³⁰ This is not surprising as all structures have to evolve with time but what is unusual is the extent of the control of the state over religion. This is symbolised in the Thai flag (introduced in 1917) which is tri-coloured: red (nation), white (religion) and blue (monarchy). The state is seen as tripartite, king-religion-nation. Since 94% of the people are Buddhist, for the vast majority, to be Thai is essentially to be Buddhist. Buddhism, as Suksamran rightly put it, has:

a unique symbolic value in Thailand as a medium for expressing hopes and aspirations not only for religious salvation from suffering but also, just as importantly, for material prosperity and social and political success.³¹

The monarch holds his position by virtue of his great merit:

The king's merit and right to rule were demonstrated both by the welfare of the state and the welfare of the *sangha* as measured by such criteria as the number and opulence of functioning monasteries, the strictness of the monks' ascetic practices and the demonstration of clerical erudition and scholarship in the scriptures, the advancement of Buddhist education for monks and lay people, and the spread of Buddhism.³²

Since *kammic* merit is seen as ruling the lives of people and states, the reigning monarch has both a desire and a responsibility to see that the *sangha* is well ordered during his reign – for his own welfare as well as his people's. The Chakri kings have taken this responsibility seriously. The King's role is called '*sasanupaatham ศาสนูปถัมภ์*', or 'upholder of the faith', 'sponsor' or 'patron'. The control exercised through his patronage is greater than that of a British Monarch's. The present King Rama IX has

³⁰ Jackson (1989), 2.

³¹ Suksamran (1977), 28-29.

³² Suksamran (1984), 28-29.

expanded the meaning of 'upholder of the faith' to cover other religions. Moves to declare Thailand constitutionally a Buddhist state have, so far, been deflected.

In the Sukhothai and Ayutthaya periods monarchs periodically intervened to purge the *sangha*. The first Chakri monarch formalized this intervention in a royal edict in 1782. King Rama V in 1902 passed a *Sangha* Act that, for the first time, created a centralised administrative authority. A nation-wide examination system for Buddhist clergy was instituted and Buddhist teachings could be scrutinised for orthodoxy. The King chose from the royal *Thammayut* denomination the head of the *sangha*, *Phrasangharaj*, who in turn led the *mahatherasamakhom*.³³

In 1932 Thailand changed from absolute to constitutional monarchy. To establish a *sangha* administration in parallel with the new constitutional form of government, the *Sangha* Act of 1941 was eventually passed. The Act provided a democratic approach to administering Buddhism in Thailand³⁴. *Phrasangharaj* was given very limited power and had to use his power through the three organs of the *sangha*, namely, the *sanghasapha* as the legislature, the *ganasanghamontri* as the executive, and the *ganavinayadhara* as the judiciary.³⁵

After his October 1958 coup, Marshall Sarit Thanarat dissolved the Thai parliament, suspended the constitution, banned political parties, and instituted martial law. He was a monarchist and strengthened the King's role as a symbol of Thai national unity and identity as a tool in the fight against the perceived threat of communism. In 1962 Sarit promulgated a new *Sangha* Act that abolished the *sanghasapha* and the other

³³ Payutto (2001), 28-29; Jackson (1989), 69; Suksamran (1984), 60.

³⁴ Jackson (1989), 70-73.

³⁵ Payutto (2001), 30.

administrative organs set up under the 1941 Act, arguing that the democratic system had led to an inefficient administration of the *sangha*. The *Sangha* Act of 1962 centralised administrative authority in the *phrasangharaj* as head of a reconstituted *Mahatherasamakhom*.³⁶ The central government was in the hands of a *phrasangharaj* appointed from each denomination in turn by the King. The secular government, however, oversaw religious affairs through the Secretary General of the *Sangha* Council who was also the Director General of the Department of Religious Affairs in the Ministry of Education.

In 2002, a new *sangha* law, drafted by the *sangha*, occasioned monks' protests on the grounds that the draft infringed the King's right to choose the *phrasangharaj*.³⁷ Payutto condemned both sides to the disputes for merely promoting selfish interests and not concerning themselves with the problems facing Buddhism.³⁸ Having described the enormous potential of the work of the *sangha* for good in today's Thailand, Payutto commented:

With the current latent conflicts unrectified under the attitude of indifference and inaction, the direction of Thai Buddhism seems unpredictable.³⁹

There are today nearly thirty thousand monasteries throughout Thailand. The monasteries are of two *nikaya*,⁴⁰ the *Thammayut*, numbering 1,502, and the *Mahanikaya*,

³⁶ Payutto (2001), 30-31.

³⁷ Following the administrative reforms of the Thaksin government in 2002, there are two administrative bodies for the regulation of the *sangha*. One is the Religious Department at the Culture Ministry and the other is the National Buddhism Bureau under the Prime Minister's Office.

³⁸ Bangkok Post April 5th, 2002 'Scholar berates selfish interests'.

³⁹ Payutto (2001), 153.

⁴⁰ In 1881 CE King Rama V recognised Thammayut and Mahanikaya as distinct administrative orders of the Thai *sangha*. In this way the Thammayut as a minority élite within the *sangha* paralleled the aristocrat élite that ruled the country.

numbering 26,694.⁴¹

1.3.2 The doctrinal development

An understanding of how this development affects Thai Buddhism helps with comprehension of the three major groupings of modern Thai Buddhism: state, radical and folk. A brief background is given, followed by a discussion of the doctrinal development towards *lokiyadhamma*, and the return of *lokuttaradhamma*.

Buddhists are taught to take refuge in the ‘triple gems’, the Buddha, the *dhamma*, and the *sangha*. The *dhamma*, an oral tradition, was brought together at the first *sangha* council at Rajagha, circa. 470 BCE.⁴² A second council, at Vesali, was held circa. 370 BCE, when the more liberal *Mahāsanghikas* began to move away from the *Theravadins*. King Asoka in India, of the *Theravadins*, sent out missionaries to other lands. Some, led by Asoka’s relative Mahinda, carried the Buddha’s teaching to Sri Lanka. The *Theravāda* Pali canon, the *Tipiṭaka*, was first written down on palm leaves at a council in Sri Lanka circa. 70 BCE,⁴³ about 400 years after the death of the Buddha. There are three baskets⁴⁴; *Vinayapiṭaka*, *Suttapiṭaka* and *Abhidhammapiṭaka*.⁴⁵ The *sangha* has been responsible for the transmission of the *dhamma*.

There has been a strong connection between Buddhism in Sri Lanka and Thailand since the Sukhothai era. As Western ideas flooded Thailand during the colonial period when the French and British came to Siam, the influence of Sri Lanka’s Buddhism declined.

⁴¹ Payutto (2001), 23-24.

⁴² De Silva (1975), 138.

⁴³ Jackson (1988), 312.

⁴⁴ *Ṭiṭaka* means basket. The bundles of palm leaves were held in groups in three baskets, hence *Tipiṭaka*.

⁴⁵ De Silva (1975), 138.

Western technology and science seemed to contradict the long established worldview of the *Traibhumikatha*. The Thai élite of the time tried to blend Buddhism with science, reconciling the two by justifying and demonstrating how Buddhism supports science and vice versa. For instance, Tipakornwong wrote in *Nangsuesadangkitjanukit*, that the Lord Buddha himself implied that the world was round. He claimed that heaven and hell in the *Traibhumikatha* were figurative descriptions suiting the beliefs of people in the past.⁴⁶

The former worldview and beliefs that were strongly intertwined with the *Traibhumikatha* had linked purpose in this life with that of the life beyond death, all the way to *nibbāna*. Among the educated, the old views were gradually replaced by an emphasis on this life and things relating to success in this life. Teachings about life after death, heaven and hell, and subsequent lives were brushed aside and gradually lost their significance. Beliefs in the *Phrasri-arn* (พระศรีอารย the Buddha to come), the wish for *Buddhaphum* (พุทธภูมิ the realm of the Buddha) were overlooked and neglected.

King Rama IV was the first Thai king who announced that he no longer dared to wish for *Buddhaphum* as others had done.⁴⁷ It was the experience of everyday living in the present life that was important for him and the élite of the time. This change in the King's belief strongly influenced Buddhist *dhamma* making *lokuttaradhamma* less significant than *lokiyadhamma*. *Lokiyadhamma* emphasizes the truth relating to the physical world, the individual and relationships – including the individual and society. *Lokuttaradhamma* emphasizes the mind and *nibbāna*.

There are three key monks, who have had great impact on the doctrinal development of Thai Buddhism : Somdejphramahasamanachaokrompraya-vajjirayanwaroroj (สมเด็จพระมหา

⁴⁶ Tipakornwong (1971), 99-100.

⁴⁷ Chomklaw (1972), 85.

สมเด็จพระเจ้ากรมพระยาวชิรญาณวโรรส), who will be referred to as Vajjirayanwaroraj, Buddhādāsa and Payutto. Vajjirayanwaroraj was made the head of the Thammayut order by his father, King Rama IV. Vajjirayanwaroraj propagated the new 'scientific' Buddhism which until then had been confined to a limited circle, spreading it throughout the kingdom. He accomplished this through a national curriculum which he set up for his newly established Buddhist education system. These *Naktham* Studies and Pali Studies in preparation for the monkhood are still in use. They consist largely of learning the Pali text and its Thai translation by heart.⁴⁸ He organized the curriculum for the higher education of monks for the newly established Mahamakutrajjavittayalai, which later became the Mahamakut University. His father, King Rama IV appointed Vajjirayanwaroraj as the first *phrasangharaj*. Several of Vajjirayanwaroraj's own writings were very influential.⁴⁹ As a result, the scientific ideas sidelining the *Traibhumikatha* not only became widespread but there was uniformity in the *sangha*. Vajjirayanwaroraj's writings made Buddhism more scientific, returning the Buddha from the exalted, even mythological, position he had held into the realm of human beings. King Rama IV wrote that the Buddha was originally like us but because he had *paññā*, he was able to analyse and come to know the path to end all suffering.⁵⁰

Previously the Kings and the people perceived that *nibbāna* was something all should hope for and have as their goal in life. King Rama IV believed that *nibbāna* or *lokuttaradhamma* was something which only some, namely monks who sacrifice their life for Buddhism in pursuit of *nibbāna*, could hope for. As a result the ordinary lay people saw *nibbāna* as something beyond, something for their next lives. *Nibbāna* gradually lost its significance and was no longer the goal in life for the ordinary person.

⁴⁸ Swearer & Promta (2000), 2-3.

⁴⁹ Visalo (1999), 6.

⁵⁰ Chomklaw (1968), 2-4.

Consequently *lokuttaradhamma* and *lokiyadhamma* began to drift apart, 'lokuttaradhamma' gradually becoming *dhamma* for the monks and 'lokiyadhamma' *dhamma* for the laity.

1.3.2.1 Towards *Lokiyadhamma* Buddhism

Facing western technology, Thai Buddhism abandoned its worldview of the *Traibhumikatha*. Life after death and rebirth into the next life were seen as no longer appropriate as they were unscientific. All that could not be scientifically proven or explained was considered superstitious. Even things that were mentioned in the *Tipiṭaka* were swept away. Vajjirayanwaroraj wrote about hell in the *Tipiṭaka* that:

We of course put high value on our religion. When we encounter such things (i.e. things about hell) it poses a dilemma. One feels ashamed to come out and support it and at the same time one is not able to deny it.⁵¹

This thinking and belief that all truth has to be scientifically proven reduces the world to materialistic perceptions, a view held by Buddhist thinkers from the time of King Rama IV. As a consequence *lokuttaradhamma* diminished in significance, almost reducing Buddhism to *lokiyadhamma*. Aspects of Buddhist teaching, especially those relating to *paramatthadhamma*, were lost to view.

In the time of Vajjirayanwaroraj, *nibbāna* was no longer the goal in life. Gradually it ceased to be mentioned in sermons except in quotes from the *Tipiṭaka*.⁵² *Nibbāna* became an academic topic unrelated to everyday life or society and no longer an achievable goal in life. *Nibbāna* lost its importance to the extent that it was omitted from the *Thammayut* ordination ceremony as it was perceived as being no longer truthful or

⁵¹ Vajjirayanwaroraj (1995), 84.

⁵² Vajjirayanwaroraj (1971a), 159, 215.

sincere for the candidate monks to take an oath to strive for *nibbāna*.⁵³ In Vajjirayanwaroraj's opinion Buddhism for the ordinary lay folk need not include *paramatthadhamma*. It was sufficient for laity to concern themselves with the *lokiyadhamma*, morality for everyday living and for the benefits and successes that were immediate and realized in this world. Hence, lessons in schools⁵⁴ throughout the kingdom, and also religious studies at Mahamakutrajjavittayalai, did not contain key *lokuttaradhamma*⁵⁵ but only *lokiyadhamma*.⁵⁶

King Rama IV, though a monk himself prior to becoming king, believed that *nibbāna* was something far away, extremely difficult to reach, and that none in his time would be able to reach it. Consequently the previous understanding that *lokiyadhamma* and *lokuttaradhamma* were inseparable, changed. *Nibbāna* or the state of living beyond worldly existence, was no longer an achievable goal for a normal person involved in worldly existence in no matter how many lives. Moreover, the *dhamma* relating to *lokiyadhamma* was no longer related to future lives. *Sila* no longer had *anisrong* reaching to subsequent lives and was no longer considered an element to assist an individual to reach *nibbāna*. Whereas previously, the consequences of one's actions reached to the next life (*samparāyikattha*). From King Rama IV's teaching, it can be observed that the 'anisrong of *silā*' or the fruits of the merit gained from keeping the *silā*, are emphasized for this life. They end in the next life and do not reach beyond to *nibbāna*.⁵⁷ Vajjirayanwaroraj also ignored *samparāyikattha* and emphasized observable results, especially the suffering or happiness evident in this life. As for results in a future life, Vajjirayanwaroraj asserted that it could not be discussed because there could be no

⁵³ Vajjirayanwaroraj (1971b), 188.

⁵⁴ King Rama VI decreed education for all boys and girls ages 7-11. This marked the start of the Thai public education system in 1921; Syamananda (1973), 149-150.

⁵⁵ Such as *trilak*, *ariyasacca*.

⁵⁶ Mostly relating to morality e.g. *benjasila* and *benjadhamma*.

⁵⁷ Chomklaw (1968), 35.

witnesses or evidence.⁵⁸ It can be seen that the leaders of that time, in trying to adapt Buddhism to make it appeal to the new generation, used western scientific education and reduced Buddhism to a system of morality, a Buddhism that emphasized *lokiyadhamma* and neglected the *lokuttaradhamma*. Consequently, *dhamma* relating to *samādhi* and *paññā*, which lead to *nibbāna*, lost in significance.

King Rama VI wrote in 1911 in '*Desanasuapah*' (หนังสือเทศนาเสือป่า) of his understanding of Buddhism and of the educated Thais of the time that, 'The heart of Buddhism is that those who do good receive good and those who do evil receive evil.'⁵⁹ In other words, Buddhism has been reduced to the teaching of good and evil instead of *nibbāna* which is beyond good and evil.

Lokiyadhamma Buddhism became widespread not only through Vajirayanwaroraj's efforts but also through the support of the government of the day. The government merged nationalism into Buddhism and used it as its tool. This kind of Buddhism was included in the national school curriculum and was propagated by the various government media and channels. Buddhism now not only taught how to be a good person but also to be a good citizen. Responsibility towards the nation became one important virtue of a Thai person and of a Buddhist. The unity between the nation, Buddhism and being Thai were continuously stressed. King Rama VI asserted:

Buddhism is the religion of our nation. We need to hold on to it out of gratitude (*kataññū*) to our parents and ancestors. Because I feel sure about this matter, I am able to stand here speaking to you all about Buddhism in the assured hope that you all who are Thai know now and realize that religion in these days is inseparable from the nation. Therefore, we who are Thais need to remain in our Buddhism which is our national religion.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Vajirayanwaroraj (1971a), 322.

⁵⁹ Mongkutklaw (1927), 85; Nabangchang (1992), 180.

⁶⁰ Mongkutklaw (1927), 57-58.

The *dhamma* was used in support of nationalism:

To fight for one's country is not something that the Lord Buddha has forbidden. For if the Lord Buddha had not approved of it, then why did he force those monks who were escaped soldiers from King Pimpisarn's (พระเจ้าพิมพิสาร) army to return to the army?

Fighting the enemy who invades one's country, who disrespects or tramples on Buddhism, and who has ill intentions towards the nation, is the obligation and duty of all Thai men. They must rise up and fight with all their might.⁶¹

So Buddhism gradually changed under the Chakri dynasty from its strong links with the *Traibhumikatha*. *Lokuttaradhamma* continued to lose significance leaving instead the *lokiyadhamma* intertwined with nationalism. The result was that Buddhism was entrenched as the national religion, but reduced to a system of morality and ethics, a tool for the ruling power to use in the name of the nation, responding to the needs of the nation – it will be categorised here as 'State Buddhism'. State Buddhism has been part of the national curriculum from primary education onwards from the time of King Rama VI until the present day. Even though there have been several revisions, the Buddhism content remained unchanged with the emphasis on morality: gratitude (*kataññūkataveđi* กตัญญูกตเวทิต), honesty (ชื่อสัตย์สุจริต), discipline, faithfulness and loyalty to the nation, Buddhism and the King.⁶²

The influence of modern technology and science not only resulted in *nibbāna* fading out of everyday life, but also in an increase in *saiyasart*. When Thailand underwent modernization, the *sangha* attempted to eradicate *saiyasart* from the temples.⁶³ Under *dhamma*, elements of *saiyasart* were like placebos for the ordinary populace but outside *dhamma* they became pure *saiyasart*. So fortune-telling, amulets and magic escaped

⁶¹ Mongkutklaw (1927), 101,120.

⁶² Visalo (1999), 13.

⁶³ Visalo (2003), 99.

Buddhist restraints and grew out of control. Payutto recognized that Buddhism mixed with *saiyasart* was necessary for some groups of people but it needed to be based on and under the control of Buddhism:

We cannot only help those who are already good, but we must also help those who are furthest away. Buddhism must not limit itself. Thus there is a kind of Buddhism that is not pure, it has ghosts and spirits, magic, and the occult mixed in. If one truly understood the ultimate purpose or the intention behind them and was firm in *paṭipadā*, one would see that the things that were not pure were merely steps or tools to assist in the crossing over to the pure. But if one does not grasp the purposes, even the pure will be swallowed by the impure.⁶⁴

For Payutto, it is important not to destroy ‘impure’ Buddhism but to link the ‘impure’ to the ‘pure’. As long as it is regulated by pure Buddhism and leads the individual to self-development and ultimately to freedom, then it is acceptable. ‘Impure Buddhism’ will be categorised as ‘Folk Buddhism’.

1.3.2.2 The return of *Lokuttaradhamma*

Buddhadāsa was the first to bring *lokuttaradhamma* back to the consciousness of Thai Buddhists with *nibbāna* at the heart of Buddhism. Despite this difference with State Buddhism, Buddhadāsa remained within the *sangha* throughout his life as he strove to lead Thai Buddhism back to the Buddha’s original teaching found in the *tipiṭaka*. Buddhadāsa tried to re-assert *dhamma* for the everyday support of people against materialism, selfishness and *saiyasart*. In all his sermons, lectures and books, Buddhadāsa stressed that *nibbāna* is the ultimate goal in life for all Buddhists. This strand of Buddhism will be categorised as, ‘Radical Buddhism’.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Payutto (1984), 345-346.

⁶⁵ From the Latin, radix, radic meaning root. It goes back to the root, to the Buddha’s original teaching as found in the *Tipiṭaka*.

Payutto expanded upon Buddhādāsa's work, particularly the social dimension of Buddhism. In his acclaimed great work '*Phutthatham*', he presented Buddhist *dhmma* principles, linking them systematically from *lokiyadhamma* to *lokuttaradhamma*, and the ultimate *paramatthadhamma*, *nibbāna*.⁶⁶ Payutto proposed and demonstrated how a Buddhist worldview can be applied in the modern context and how the application of *dhmma* can benefit not only the individual but society and the world. This has made Buddhist *dhmma* more relevant and appealing to modern educated Thais who thus appreciate the value of Buddhism.

1.4 Current Thai Buddhism

Although the great majority of the Thai people declare their religion as Buddhist, Buddhism in Thailand does not present a monolithic front. There are the mainstream Buddhists, who have been categorised here as state, radical and folk.⁶⁷ But, in the last thirty years, there have been several new Buddhist movements. Two movements which stir scholarly and media interest are Thammakaay and Santi Asoke, but they lie outside the scope of this thesis.⁶⁸

1.4.1 State Buddhism

State Buddhism is the philosophical understanding of Buddhism which makes it a major pillar of the State. Historically Buddhism and kingship have supported each other, with *kamma* as the key doctrine. This teaching holds that a person's present state of well-

⁶⁶ Magnum opus of over 1,200 pages.

⁶⁷ Regardless of denomination (*Thammayut* or *Mahanikaya*). Jackson categorised Thai Buddhism with similar views, as Establishment Buddhism, Reformist Buddhism, and Thai Supernaturalism. Jackson (1989), 40-62.

⁶⁸ They contribute little to Buddhist-Christian dialogue.

being or suffering is related to the moral or immoral quality of his or her past actions.⁶⁹

However, this explanation of an individual's personal state has been developed further to cover his/her position in society. Thus an individual's past merits as well as present ones qualify him/her to hold high position or not. The monarch, naturally, must have had the highest merit to reach his/her exalted position. Thai kings have, until today, been given semi-divine status.⁷⁰ This cosmology was systematised in the *Traibhumikatha*:

Traiphum ... propagated the ideas that kingship was necessary for the maintenance and transmission of dhamma and that as a universal monarch (*cakkavatti*) the king, placed at the apex of the world of men, guaranteed a ranked social order of merit making opportunities, which order in turn took its place in the larger cosmos of the three worlds.⁷¹

State Buddhism, however, does not have to be considered as solely monarchist. The state simply uses the control given by the traditional belief in hierarchies for its own political purpose.⁷² As already explained, the impact of western science was so great that it steadily discredited the *Traibhumikatha*, and as a consequence *lokuttaradhamma* and *nibbāna* lost significance reducing state Buddhism to *lokiyadhamma* intertwined with nationalism.

1.4.2 Radical Buddhism

This form of Buddhism seeks to go back to Buddhism's roots and bases its teaching on what is contained in the Pali canon, the *Tipiṭaka*, and not on later writings such as

⁶⁹ A recent example of the sway of the law of kamma in 2002 was a Constitutional Court Ruling. Two lawyers applied to sit the examination to become judges. They were refused permission to sit on the grounds that they were unfit because they limped as a result of childhood polio. This meant they had bad *kamma*. Bangkok Post, May 2002.

⁷⁰ Household shrines especially to kings of the Chakri dynasty are common. Large crowds of both government officials and ordinary people observe religious rituals at the statues of revered kings each year. The army's loyalty to the monarchy is reinforced each year by a semi-religious ceremony where Buddhist monks and Brahmins bless holy water with which weapons are anointed and officers drink the water to swear fealty (ถือน้ำพิพัฒน์สัตยา - *thuanampipatsattaya*).

⁷¹ Heaven - earth - hell ; Tambiah (1976), 186.

⁷² Jackson (1989), 42-43.

Traibhumikatha. Radicals find the *Tipiṭaka* sufficient for all their Buddhist teaching. The doctrines, morals and ethics found therein are, for them, all that is needed to guide a person to *nibbāna*. And not only for the individual – the life of the state too should be based on the teachings of the *Tipiṭaka*.⁷³

The radicals treat the hierarchical doctrines of heavens and hells metaphysically and find soundness in the teachings of the Buddha. In the *khandas*,⁷⁴ they also find up-to-date psychological analysis. Some radicals dispute even the traditional Buddhist doctrine of rebirth. The radicals believe the application of the Buddha's teachings provides a totally adequate basis for governing a complex modern state. They seek to make *lokuttaradhamma* and *nibbāna* relevant to modern Thai society without recourse to the *Traibhumikatha*. Both Buddhādāsa and Payutto have demonstrated this in many of their works.

Buddhādāsa speaks of two kinds of vocabulary: *phasakhon* and *phasatham*. In this way the Buddha's teaching may be 'demythologised':

The terms 'heaven' (*sugati*, *svarga*) and 'hell' (*dugati*, *naraka*) in the Buddhist scriptures are merely metaphorical references to mental states of well-being and woe. ... references to gods, divine beings, and hellish beings in the scriptures do not denote actual entities in supernatural realms but rather refer to human beings who experience either 'heavenly' states of well-being or 'hellish' states of loss and woe. This anti-metaphysical interpretation of Buddhist doctrine is associated with an emphasis on human life in this world here-and-now and a religious validation of the hope for socio-economic development and material prosperity.⁷⁵

⁷³ For example abortion in Thailand has not been legalised, even the culling of stray dogs in Bangkok or elsewhere is not favoured, because of the Buddha's teaching against taking life.

⁷⁴ The constituent factors of a person.

⁷⁵ Jackson (1989), 48.

Buddhadāsa's interpretation of the *paṭiccasamuppāda*, introduces the possibility of *nibbāna* being open to everyone. That is, each person, lay or ordained, male or female, has a chance to find individual salvation. Indeed a person does not need to die to reach *nibbāna* but may enter it in this life. The *Dhammapada* indicates that a *bhikkhu* is not just one ordained, but, 'one who is restrained in body and mind, humble, pure, not slothful, delights in the *dhamma*, behaves with loving kindness...'.⁷⁶ Stories of laymen who became *arahants* and attained *nibbāna* were also told. The attainment of *nibbāna* is not, according to radicals, limited to monks. This emphasis on *nibbāna* being open to all gives lay people a new dignity and contrasts with state Buddhism with its teaching that the function of the lay person is to make merit by supporting the efforts of ordained monks to attain *nibbāna*. Despite their differences, radical and state Buddhism are at one in opposing folk Buddhism which they see as a threat to social order and stability.

1.4.3 Folk Buddhism

Folk Buddhism is dominated by *saiyasart*, which is concerned with the personal and does not support central social control. If someone's amulet will save him/her from a serious accident while driving – why should he/she keep to the speed limit? The use of such objects reveals a lack of self-confidence in oneself and psychological dependence, whereas the Buddha teaches that one depends on oneself, and not on *saiyasart* practices. The fabric of society is threatened by the individualism encouraged by *saiyasart*. Where *saiyasart* increases, religion decreases. Individuality is exalted, resulting in a lack of a shared morality without which social rules and laws cannot be enforced:

The perceived threat of supernaturalism has long been a concern, of Thai rulers, ... several of King Rama I's edicts on *sangha* conduct in the late

⁷⁶ Swearer (1977), 126. Chapter 25 of the *Dhammapada* can be found in the second of the 'Three Baskets', see glossary *tipiṭaka*.

eighteenth century included warnings against monks undertaking activities such as making magic potions and making astrological predictions.⁷⁷

The widespread nature of *saiyasart* beliefs is in evidence everywhere. On television, films on the supernatural take prime evening spots. When cabinet ministers are newly appointed they commonly refurbish their offices according to a fortune-teller's specifications. Fortune-tellers are employed not only to give the right moment for personal events, but also for laying foundation stones for government projects and businesses. Spirit houses are to be found everywhere, and objects such as trees or rocks may be 'ordained' and offerings made to them.

Folk Buddhism is deplored for being unsystematic, unscientific and encouraging irresponsibility. Radical and state Buddhism support social control whether by emphasising the *lokuttaradhamma* and *nibbāna*, or by the law of *kamma* combined with the *Traibhumikatha*.

1.5 Summary

Buddhism, the Thai national religion, has been used for the creation of the Thai identity. It is one of the three institutions holding the Thai nation together and symbolized in the Thai flag. Monarchy and government support Buddhism with close interrelationships. Despite the fact that nowadays there are various interpretations of Buddhist teachings, the concepts of Buddhist morality are known by the ordinary Thai. *Theravāda* Buddhism maintains its unity and continuity through a common core of doctrine and rituals

⁷⁷ Jackson (1989), 58.

sustained and perpetuated by the monastic institution, the *sangha*.⁷⁸ The government of the *sangha* mirrors the government of the state. The state uses and controls the *sangha* from monarchy to democracy through the *sangha* acts. Three *Sangha* Acts dealing with clerical conduct and administration have been enforced.⁷⁹

As western knowledge, technology and science began to pervade society in the nineteenth century it was felt necessary to update Buddhist teaching. Vajirayanwaroraj, son of King Rama IV, head of the *Thammayut* order and the first *Phrasangharaja*, organized the national curriculum for the *sangha*. *Lokuttaradhamma* leading to *nibbāna* was displaced by *lokiyadhamma*, morality for everyday living. Buddhism became Buddhist morality and nationalism. *Saiyasart*, no longer regulated by monks educated in *dhamma*, fortune telling, amulets and magic have become pure *saiyasart*, preying on the credulous. These are the majority folk Buddhists. The centrality of an accessible *nibbāna* and the way to reach it was revived by two great twentieth century figures: Buddhādāsa who brought *nibbāna* back as the goal for all, and Payutto who systematised Buddhist teaching for the modern age.

Current Thai Buddhism is complex, each Buddhist group claiming to be more authentic than the others. Conflicts between the two *nikayas*, *Thammayut* and *Mahanikaya* still continue in the Thai *sangha*. Crossing the boundaries of the *nikayas*, three major groupings⁸⁰ of Thai Buddhists may be observed. The first is **State Buddhism** with *lokiyadhamma* intertwined with nationalism, teaching that each person has his/her rank in society according to the law of *kamma*, the king being pre-eminent. Then there is **Radical Buddhism** taking its teaching from the *Tipiṭaka*. The law of *kamma* applies to

⁷⁸ Kirsch (1977), 245.

⁷⁹ Payutto (2001), 29.

⁸⁰ Kirsch (1977), 244.

one's actions, buttressed by logic and reason and cause and effect. Any person, monk or lay, male or female, may possibly achieve *nibbāna*. Radical Buddhism is well supported by the educated, middle-class with great monk leaders such as Buddhādāsa and Payutto.

Thirdly there is **Folk Buddhism**, spanning all social groups, where people are in awe of the spirit world. *Saiyasart*, rather than reason, rules. Spirits may have to be appeased or they may be manipulated for personal advantage, and *kamma* may take the form of fatalism. Monks may still be revered and turned to for advice and direction in life.

Chapter Two: Christianity in Thailand

The development of Christianity in the Thai Buddhist context is investigated. The historical development provides some understanding of how Thai Buddhists perceive Christianity and the reasons for their perceptions. Before setting out the historical context, a common problem occurs for any writer on church history in Thailand. Alexander Smith in his introduction to *Siamese Gold: A History of Church Growth in Thailand: An Interpretive Analysis 1816-1982* writes, 'The tragedy is that no archives had been kept in Thailand, by either Thai Churches or by the foreign Missions until recently'.¹ The Roman Catholics (referred to simply as Catholics), the first to come to what is now Thailand, are examined followed by the Protestants.

2.1 The Thai Catholic Church

Thailand has a network of Catholic dioceses under two archdioceses with one Thai cardinal. The bishops and most of the priests are Thai. The Catholics have schools, colleges and a university. They also have hospitals and do extensive social work with disadvantaged people: orphans, unmarried mothers, AIDS patients, the elderly, slum dwellers, the physically handicapped and illegal aliens. Most prestigious private schools are Catholic schools. How the Catholic historical development of nearly 500 years has contributed to the present circumstances will be considered.

¹ Smith (1999), xxvi.

2.1.1 Historical outline of the Thai Catholic Church

Roman Catholicism first entered Siam in 1511.² Initially Siam, then the Kingdom of Ayuttaya³, was a mere stepping stone for the missionaries to go east to Indo-China. However, many settled in peaceful Ayuttaya because of unrest and war in Indo-China.⁴ These early missionaries ministered mainly to their fellow Catholics who were foreigners, leading the Siamese to conclude that Christianity was for foreigners. The impression that Christianity is a foreigners' religion has proved to be a major hindrance right up to the present Rattanakosin era.

The Catholics in Siam were very active during the reign of King Narai (1656-1688). French missionaries became involved in international politics between the two countries and Siam nearly lost its independence.⁵ In 1680, a Greek Catholic adventurer, Constantine Phaulkon, rose to prominence as a government minister at the court of King Narai⁶ and built a close relationship with the French court of Louis XIV to gain political and financial power.⁷ He knew the French Catholic missionaries well and helped them to gain access to the court of King Narai.

The embassies from France to Siam included not only politicians but also Catholic priests and French soldiers. The Siamese feared that the French Catholics through Phaulkon were rapidly gaining power and were about to convert the King. When King Narai fell critically ill in 1688, Phaulkon used French military support to try to seize the

² Siam changed its name to Thailand in 1940 ; Smith (1999), 9.

³ See page two footnote three, 'Periods in Thai History'.

⁴ Smith (1999), 20.

⁵ Ibid., 9.

⁶ Kim (1980), 36.

⁷ Pongudom, P (1998), 38.

throne. This ignited a violent anti-French uprising: Phaulkon was arrested, tortured and beheaded; Catholic priests were banished or imprisoned. The violent fall of Phaulkon shocked French officials and frightened the tiny Catholic constituency.⁸ Phrapitraya seized the throne and expelled the French soldiers and missionaries from the country. Henceforth, the Siamese were very wary of the Catholics and vice versa, so the Catholics made few inroads among the Siamese population. The work of the remaining Catholic missionaries at this period consisted mainly of evangelism and charity for the poor. They were no longer tools of the French court for political gain.⁹

In 1767, the Burmese destroyed Ayuttaya, and Taksin, the surviving general, moved the capital to Thonburi where he crowned himself King. In 1779, the Catholic missionaries were expelled from Siam for refusing to take part in the oath of allegiance to the newly crowned King Taksin.¹⁰ In 1782, Rama I, who replaced Taksin, invited missionaries back to restore good relations between Siam and France.

During the reign of King Rama III, the Catholics printed a book, '*Bujchawisajchana*' ('Questions Answered') which severely attacked and criticized Buddhism. Rama III prohibited its publication and distribution and, in 1849, Catholic missionaries refused to take part in a Buddhist ceremony to promote hope and encouragement among the Thai people after a serious cholera epidemic. This resulted in the third expulsion of the majority of Catholic missionaries towards the end of Rama III's reign.¹¹ During the same period, Protestants first entered Siam and introduced themselves more subtly.

⁸ Smith (1999), 9.

⁹ Pongudom, P (1998), 44.

¹⁰ Ibid., 44-52.

¹¹ Ibid., 59-61.

King Rama IV invited the missionaries, expelled under Rama III, back to Siam and gave Christians, both Catholics and Protestants, more freedom than ever before despite the fact that he himself was a very strong Buddhist. Not only did the missionaries evangelize throughout Siam, they also built churches and schools in major towns. The Catholic priests did not want to have any problems with the local Buddhists, the officials of the court or the king as had occurred in the past, so worked unobtrusively and became known as the 'Quiet monks'. In the eyes of Thai leaders and the élite, the Catholic priests were seen as confined in their churches with religious roles.¹²

During Rama V's reign came the first Vatican Council 1870, the high point in the centralization of the Catholic Church.¹³ The Catholic ministry reached out for the first time to the northeast and eventually in 1899 they were able to establish the district of 'Mission Laos'.¹⁴ Their work progressed, but not without problems and persecution from the provincial Thai officials who forbade interested Thai locals from becoming Catholics. But the most serious hindrance to their gaining converts was the political problem of colonization by western countries.

¹² In contrast, the Protestant missionaries not only evangelized but also introduced new western technology to the Thai people. (Anon. (1978), 27-28) They had an active role in Thai society and were called 'Doctors who teach religion' (*mohsornsasana* - หมอสอนศาสนา). This sentiment is well captured in the following saying of Prince Damrongrajaparb (สมเด็จพระยาดำรงราชานุภาพ):

Both sects emphasize and teach the same Christian religion but have different policies. Catholic priests usually established themselves as monks (*Phrasrong*); they emphasise and build up their religion and teach and train the people who are converted. Whereas the Protestant missionaries establish themselves as teachers (*Kru*), bringing both religion and civilization to teach foreigners without any discrimination. They seek ways to be useful and benefit the locals e.g. healing the sick and educating the locals making them more knowledgeable. They gain respect from the locals and thus take a step leading to teaching their religion. Therefore, the Protestant missionaries are more acceptable to Thai people than are the Catholic priests. (Damrongrajaparb (1955), 68-69)

¹³ Küng (2003a), 174.

¹⁴ Pongudom, P (1998), 78.

King Rama V faced territorial encroachments from France and Britain. Between 1884 and 1896 Siam's territories shrank from 500,000 to 300,000 square miles. France showed her intention of invading Siam in 1893 by sending warships up the Chaophraya river. Since neither France nor Britain wanted the other to control the kingdom, they signed a treaty guaranteeing the independence of Siam, effectively defining its borders, but it was a smaller Siam.¹⁵ Since France had not completely gained the upper hand, the Protestant missionaries were not as disadvantaged as they might otherwise have been, for France normally favoured Catholicism in her territories. The Siamese, however, perceived Catholic missionaries as a clear enemy, helping and supporting the French government. The political conflict brought the missionaries' work to a standstill.

The Catholic missionaries' difficulties also stemmed from a lack of understanding of Thai culture and society, and an unwillingness to study and understand Buddhism. This was illustrated as has already been mentioned when the Catholics printed '*Bujchawisajchana*' to promote Catholicism and downplay Buddhism during the reign of Rama III. They repeated their mistake in 1897 (Rama V) by publishing a book of the same name coinciding with conflict between Siam and France over the eastern border provinces.¹⁶ The Catholic missionaries used this opportunity, with France so powerful, to publish this book belittling Buddhism, saying in essence that the ruling class in Siam used Buddhism to lead and control the people, to cover up social injustice, and support autocratic control (*padejkarn* in Thai).¹⁷ Their using religion as a political tool was no different from that which the Catholic missionaries themselves were doing, using politics to benefit religion and vice versa. These events only promoted discord between Catholic

¹⁵ Eastern provinces were lost to French Indo-China - today the countries of Cambodia and Laos. The last loss, in 1909, was of provinces in the south, now northern Malaysia, to Britain.; Syamananda (1973), 192, see appendix one. See also Tuck (1995).

¹⁶ The Rawsaw 112 incident in 1893.

¹⁷ Pongudom, P (1998), 85.

missionaries and the Siamese. Moreover, the Catholic missionaries, under the name 'Mission Siam' used their political advantage to gain recognition from the Siamese government as a legal entity in 1910.¹⁸ It was the only Christian organization existing at the time that was given such a status. The local people, government officials, and even the Kings doubted the true intentions of the Catholic missionaries and mistrusted them. Frequently, they were perceived as having a hidden agenda, always trying to take advantage when opportunity arose to seek political gain for their own religion and government.¹⁹

Preecha Jintaseriwong, a Thai Catholic scholar, analyzed reasons why Thai people feel hostile towards Catholics. He suggested that this enmity stemmed from the fact that the Thai people could not distinguish between political problems and the evangelistic work of the Catholic missionaries who were seen as supporters of the French government which wanted to take control of Siam. The Catholic missionaries would then benefit by being able to evangelize the locals more easily with support from the ruling power, using political power for their own ends.²⁰

A new era of contextualisation for the Catholic mission began in the reign of King Rama VI. Priests and missionaries from various Catholic mission groups were welcomed into Siam to help her develop and modernize. The Catholic ministry moved more towards social concern. Catholic converts came from all social strata, predominately from central and northeastern Siam. In 1924 Bishop Peros set a target that wherever there was a Catholic church, there should also be a Catholic school to educate the children from the families of converts and other local children and teach the Catholic faith. As a result,

¹⁸ Pongudom, P (1998), 86-87.

¹⁹ Anon. (1998), 276-278.

²⁰ Jintaseriwong (1988), 122.

church schools became widespread. In 1926 Catholic missionaries went north to Chiangmai where the American Presbyterians had been working since 1867. There were conflicts between the two as most new Catholic converts in the area came from the Protestant Christians.²¹

In 1940 during the reign of King Rama VIII, Siam changed her name to Thailand. Marshal Phibunsongkhram, the Prime Minister at that time (1938 - 1941), launched a campaign to inspire patriotism with groups called “Thai blood”, who claimed that the Catholics were traitors supporting the French, still seen as ‘the enemy’. They attacked Catholic churches throughout the country.²² Converts in the northeastern region were persecuted, labelled as traitors, forced to renounce their faith, or even killed.

The Japanese invasion of Thailand in 1941, in World War II (1939 –1945), brought a change. The Thai government chose to be allied to Japan, an Axis power, and was thus on the same side as the Germans and the Vichy regime in France. The Thai government then took over the churches, schools and hospitals from the Protestant missionaries (American and British) but not from the Catholics who were considered as being on the side of the Axis powers. Importantly too, those Catholic properties belonged to Mission Siam which had been a Thai legal entity since 1910.²³

The second Vatican Council (1962 – 1965) laid down policies for the reformation of the worldwide Catholic mission. In 1964, the Thai Catholic leaders met to discuss the impact of the Second Vatican document on its mission and ministry. Policies to adapt to Thai culture and engage in social work were proposed and agreed. Documents relating to

²¹ Jintaseriwong (1988), 89.

²² Ibid., 90-91.

²³ Pongudom, P (1984), 95.

mission and ministry were translated from Latin into Thai. Social work was well developed and a wide variety of social programmes were initiated, many of which became recognized by the Thai government and later became channels for evangelism.²⁴

The following year, 1965, Pope Paul VI installed the first Thai bishop, Yuong Nittayo (ยวง นิตโย).²⁵ Ten dioceses under two arch-dioceses were established in Thailand as a result of the policy to delegate power to the locals for more effective ministry. In 1969 the Thai Catholic Council was established to agree on a constitution and to draw up policies.²⁶

The fear of the spread of communism in South East Asia was driving many foreign missionaries away. Foreign priests' and bishops' positions were taken over by local Thai.²⁷ In 1976, Wittayalaisangtham (Light of *Dhamma*), Lux Mundi Seminary, was established to train local Thai for ministry. Previously trainees had been sent to Penang or Rome. Training lasted eight years and aimed at a better understanding of their own culture for improved contextualisation. Dialogue was encouraged in order to seek mutual understanding and to promote the fact that Thai Catholics were not foreigners but were really Thai.²⁸ Church buildings, furnishings, equipment and arts were executed in Buddhist temple style. Buddhist terminology was used for names of priests and other clerical terms.²⁹ This rapid change-around in policy and attitudes concerned the Thai government and staunch Buddhist groups who thought the Catholics were trying to

²⁴ Jintaseriwong (1988), 197-1999.

²⁵ Larqué (1996), 279.

²⁶ Ibid., 275-277.

²⁷ Pongpisanu (1996), 27-34.

²⁸ Jintaseriwong (1988), 241-242.

²⁹ Manorom (1987), 25.

assimilate the Thai. In 1983, Pope John Paul II installed the first Thai Cardinal, Meechai Kijboonchoo (มีชัย กิจบุญชู).³⁰

In 1984, Buddhist revivals were organized during *visakabucha*.³¹ The government and the *sangha* debated the issue of other religions using Buddhist terminology.³² The Ministry of Education issued directives that Buddhist terminology was not to be used by other religions. However, despite this, Catholics continue today to use terms such as *phrasangkharaja* (พระสังฆราชย์) for bishop, whereas Protestants transliterate words e.g. bishop (บิชอป).

Payutto concluded that as a result of the second Vatican council the Catholics had changed their attitude towards other religions from a superior attitude to one of assimilation: e.g. 'The Buddha was one of the prophets of God preparing the way like John the Baptist'.³³

2.1.2 Summary

Because of their turbulent history, expelled from Thailand three times, the Catholics have not been widely accepted by the Thais. The Church and State (i.e. Catholicism and the French embassies) were perceived by the Thais as one and the same. Politics and religion were seen as too closely intertwined. In the beginning religion was used to disguise political intentions. Later on, religion took advantage of French power to gain special privileges. Whether religion led politics or politics led religion, Thailand was at

³⁰ Larqué (1996), 281.

³¹ Buddhist New Year, commemorating the Buddha's birth, enlightenment and passing.

³² Larqué (1996), 175-176.

³³ Payutto (1997b), 174.

risk of losing its independence. This led the Thai people to perceive the Catholics as enemies. Cultural problems, compounded by an attitude of superiority without understanding, aggravated the situation. Vatican II effected a rapid change of policy and methods of ministry, all contributing to the Thai people remaining suspicious and responding negatively to the efforts of the Catholic mission.

However, today Thais appreciate both Catholic social work and their contribution to Thai education. Many high ranking government officials, businessmen, and scholars are the products of the Catholic schools. Non-governmental organizations for various social services pioneered by Catholics have gained respect and recognition from the public and the government.

2.2 The Thai Protestant Church

The Thai Protestant Church as recognized by the Thai government consists of three major groups: The Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT), The Evangelical Fellowship of Thailand (EFT), and the Baptists. These groupings are not primarily denominational but a result of the efforts of Thai Christians seeking recognition as legal entities. The discussion will cover the first two groups: the CCT, originally the work of American Presbyterian missionaries, and the EFT which broke off from the CCT. Together they encompass the majority of the Thai Protestant Churches.³⁴ How the historical development of the Thai Protestant church has contributed to its present-day situation will be investigated.

³⁴ In 2000 less than 1% of the Thai population was protestant Christians. The CCT had 276 pastors covering 540 churches; seven general hospitals and one leprosy hospital; 26 schools and two universities. (CCT 2000 statistics) The EFT had 111 member organizations (e.g. Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF), Christian Missionary Alliance (CMA), Youth with a Mission (YWAM)); 705 churches and 423 pastors. (EFT 2000 statistics).

2.2.1 Historical outline of the Thai Protestant Church

Protestant missions first arrived in Siam in 1828.³⁵ However, the only group to settle was the American Presbyterian Mission. During the reign of Rama III, the missionaries had a good relationship with the Siamese court. They were invited to teach English and science in the palace.³⁶ Among the pupils was prince Mongkut who was then a monk and later became King Mongkut (Rama IV).³⁷ In 1861, King Rama IV gave a piece of land in Bangkok to 'English Christians of the Protestant belief' now Christ Church, Bangkok. The missionaries also helped with international negotiations and treaties.³⁸ They were more acceptable to the Siamese court than the Catholics - but only because of the new technology and knowledge they brought with them - not in terms of the religion that they were trying to propagate. For the Siamese, Buddhism was the national religion, the King was the supporter of Buddhism and Buddhism penetrated the Siamese way of life, thinking, and beliefs. According to Wells, the Protestant missionaries' lack of understanding of Siamese culture and society hindered their success in evangelizing.³⁹

In spite of these shortcomings, the American Presbyterian Mission played an important role in the establishment of the Thai Protestant national Church. The four key areas of the early method of work were evangelism,⁴⁰ education, printing and medicine. The work was divided into two geographical areas; the 'Siam Mission' for central and southern Siam and the 'Laos Mission'⁴¹ for northern Siam.

³⁵ Smith (1999), 14 ; McFarland (1999), 2.

³⁶ Pongudom, P (1984), 4.

³⁷ Wells (1958), 12.

³⁸ Smith (1999), 24, 33.

³⁹ Wells (1958), 5.

⁴⁰ Presbyteries were established 1858-1860; Pongudom, P (1984), 161.

⁴¹ Not to be confused with the modern state of Laos. In those days most of the modern state of Laos was part of northern Siam ; see appendix 1: map of Siamese land lost to France and Britain (1880-1909). Today people in north-east Thailand speak Lao dialect as well as Thai.

The Siam Mission had its centre in Bangkok where several schools were established concurrently with churches.⁴² Schools and churches were established in the south in 1865 at Petchaburi, Rajaburi, Nakornsritammaraj and Trang. In 1899 the mission expanded to Pitsanulok, where the first and only mission station (consisting of a school, medical centre, and a church) run by local Thai was established.⁴³ In 1904, the Fourth Church, Suebsampantawong, was the first Thai church established by the local people in Bangkok.⁴⁴ The mission set up Siam's first modern hospital in 1884 in Rajburi, eight years before the first government hospital, Siriraj, in Bangkok in 1892.⁴⁵

The Laos Mission had Chiangmai as its centre, responsible for the work in Northern Siam and covering Chiangmai, Lampang, Prai and Lampoon.⁴⁶ It, too, established schools, churches and hospitals, all of which like those of the Siam mission, helped to gain acceptance from the local people. Nevertheless in 1869 two Thais were beheaded for converting to Christianity,⁴⁷ and in 1878, a Christian wedding was interrupted and the bride and groom forced to conform to the traditional wedding in spite of a royal decree on religious freedom. After this the missionaries appealed to King Rama V, who in 1878, reaffirmed the decree that the people had the freedom to choose their religion and practice their religious rites. This was proclaimed to all the northern towns⁴⁸ and in 1889, a training centre for local Thai to help with the mission work was able to be established.⁴⁹

⁴² Pongudom, P (1984), 8.

⁴³ Wells (1958), 113-128; The work of the author's great grandfather, Rev Boontuan Boon-Itt.

⁴⁴ Work begun by the author's great grandfather, Rev Boontuan Boon-Itt; Pongudom (1984), 8.

⁴⁵ Wells (1958), 129.

⁴⁶ Smith (1999), 64.

⁴⁷ McFarland (1999), 118.

⁴⁸ Wells (1958), 59-62; for translation of the decree see McFarland (1999), 352.

⁴⁹ In 1912 this became McGilvary seminary and now is the theology department of Payap University in Chiangmai. Payap was among the first private Thai universities and is now one of two Protestant Christian Universities. Wells (1958), 84; Anon. (1983), 393.

The northern leaders emphasised evangelism followed by schools and hospitals to build up Christian families, whereas in the South the emphasis was on education and hospital work as the means to evangelism. The methodology and the results of the two mission areas were naturally compared. Smith quotes Taylor's summary:

Educating first in order to evangelize produced "a few well-educated, outstanding leaders for the Church" but did not produce a large church. The "evangelize first and then educate" approach "resulted in a church many times as large with many more consecrated leaders who are not so well educated possibly, but are well enough equipped to meet the needs of the church".⁵⁰

In both north and south, foreign missionaries were stationed in the provincial towns taking care of schools, hospitals and churches. The churches in outlying villages depended on the centres to care for them. In the South missionaries spent a great deal of time, money and effort on schools and hospitals at the expense of church and local leadership development.

The United States Board of Foreign Mission (Headquarters of the American Presbyterian Mission) had a very clear objective for mission in Siam which was,

For the forgiveness of sins via preaching and teaching of the Gospel, with the ultimate aim of establishing churches that belong to the local people. Local Churches that are independent, able to self-support, self-govern, and able to evangelise to their own people.⁵¹

In 1895 the American Presbyterian Mission introduced the Nevius plan as a ten-year project to build up the Siam churches emphasising the three 'selfs': self-support, self-government and self-evangelization.. Foreign financial support was cut and several churches had to close as they were unable to take over the payment of their pastors and workers from the mission. Yet the missionaries did not allow the Siamese to handle the work because they felt that they were unready for the responsibility. The missionaries

⁵⁰ Smith (1999), 95.

⁵¹ Speer (1899), 11.

recognised neither the basic Siamese social interactions and beliefs nor the deeply ingrained influence of Buddhism, in particular the patron-client relationship influenced by the doctrine of *kamma*.⁵²

Obviously the first Siamese Christians were converts from Buddhism. Their way of life and religious commitment were still built on the old foundation. For example, Christian pastors faced a status problem when compared with Buddhist monks who separate themselves from society, devoting themselves to live as followers of the Buddha, with monkhood activities that are different from those of lay persons.⁵³ In contrast, Christian pastors are just ordinary people who have families. In the west being a pastor is a salaried occupation. Siamese Christians could not comprehend the need for pastors and felt it absurd for them to have to donate money to pay someone to lead them. Giving or donating (making merit or *tamboon* (ทำบุญ)) is according to one's own satisfaction, not a duty. One makes merit to improve one's position, particularly in one's next life. The Christian converts' way of showing religious beliefs and of being holy or fervent about their faith was expressed in the eastern way.⁵⁴

These different understandings of giving and of the status of monk versus pastor were obstacles for achieving the Nevius plan. It led the Mission to conclude that for the Siamese churches, the pastor system was not suitable. Each congregation could get by with a system of elders leading the churches; and pastors from the centres going round visiting the churches.⁵⁵

⁵² A lesson to be learnt from the history of the Rajaburi church; Pongudom-P (1984), 24; Smith (1999), 108-109.

⁵³ Suksamran (1977), 11; Pongudom-P (1984), 28.

⁵⁴ Pongudom-P (1984), 28; Smith (1999), 110.

⁵⁵ Smith (1999), 109.

The American Presbyterian Mission, wanting Siam to have her own national, indigenous church so that the Siamese would not feel that churches belonged to foreigners, merged the two missions in 1920 into 'The Siam Mission'.⁵⁶ In 1929, the mission gave a definition of the 'indigenous church' as:

a church that stems from a deep commitment that it is independent and is its true self. The expression of its ministry is smooth and natural, not in contradiction with Thai art, architecture, culture and poetry or writing. Its organisation, services, religious practices and rites, and the explanation of the gospel is not to lead to the perception that it is of foreign origin but that it is truly accepted as its own Siam church.⁵⁷

Thus it was named, 'The Truly Siam Church'.

In 1930 The National Christian Council of Siam was established, consisting of representatives from the American Presbyterian Mission, the American Bible Society, the Society of Evangelists, Christ Church (Church of England) and Siamese churches. The objective was to establish an organisation representing a 'Truly Siam Church' and coordinating the various Protestant missionary groups that served in Siam. In 1934 a national church was established as, 'The Church of Christ in Siam', which, when Siam changed her name to Thailand in 1940, became 'The Church of Christ in Thailand' (CCT).⁵⁸

The Thai National Church had yet to achieve the three 'selfs'. The CCT depended heavily on aid from abroad, both in terms of finance and people. Though Thai staff gradually increased, in reality the decision-making and policies were in the hands of the

⁵⁶ Pongudom, P (1984), 36-37; Wells (1958), 84.

⁵⁷ Pongudom, P (1984), 63.

⁵⁸ Wells (1958), 143-144; Pongudom, P (1984), 65.

missionaries. Moreover the CCT still had 'The National Christian Council of Siam' supervising and guiding its dealings with foreign organisations.⁵⁹

In 1934 the CCT asked the Thai government to recognise it as a legal entity. It wanted recognition similar to the recognition given to the Catholics during the reign of Rama VI.⁶⁰ The Thai government declined its request on the grounds that the Thai constitution already stated that all Thai people had the freedom to choose and practise their own religion. Therefore a religious organisation could already freely practice under the constitution. It was inadvisable for the Protestants to claim a similar status to the Catholics, since the Catholics had received their privileged status under an absolute monarchy. It had been given according to a treaty between Siam and France, with His Majesty the King granting the Catholics the right to hold property in Siam. Later on this caused problems with the Thai government as the treaty was seen as the West enforcing extra-territorial rights for its own interests in Asian countries. The Thais felt the treaty was unjust.⁶¹ To this day non-Thais and even Thais with foreign spouses may not buy land in Thailand.

Absolute monarchy was replaced by a constitutional one in 1932 and a nationalist movement emerged. In 1938 Marshal Piboonsongkram, the Prime Minister, wanted to reclaim the territories taken by France. As a result of the protest against France, bad feelings spilt over to other western countries, affecting not only the foreign missionaries but also Thai Christians, Protestant and Catholic. The Thai government, under a patriotism campaign, attempted to force Thai Christians to renounce their faith and to

⁵⁹ Pongudom, P (1984), 73; Smith (1999), 181.

⁶⁰ Pongudom, P (1998), 86.

⁶¹ Pongudom, P (1984), 76-77.

embrace Buddhism, the national religion, since to be Thai was seen as equivalent to being Buddhist.⁶²

Thai Christians in the northern provinces, being ignorant of the law and afraid of the government officials, again suffered persecution. The CCT distributed the Thai constitution section two, the thirteenth article, on the rights of the Thai people to choose and practise their own religion so that Thai Christians knew their status and rights. But the government was running a strong nationalistic campaign along the lines of, 'religion builds national unity'. This is reflected in Luangvichitrvadakarn's speech on *Makabucha* day (Feb 11th, 1941) emphasizing that Thai people should realize the greatness of the Thai nation and should choose the unity of the nation over their beliefs and religious practices. He also expressed victory over Christianity and claimed that hundreds of Christians had returned to the peace and protection of Buddhism. In spite of constitutional religious freedom, Thais perceived fellow non-Buddhist Thais as traitors and non-patriots, a dishonour to the King. This placed pressures on Thai Christians and often meant their being persecuted.⁶³

The Japanese invaded Thailand in December 1941. The Prime Minister then signed a treaty and became Japan's ally. Foreign missionaries in the north were able to escape through Burma into India, but in the south and central Thailand, they were unable to escape. All were captured and interned. In 1942, they were repatriated in an exchange of prisoners of war. The CCT was thus separated from its supporting missions. Churches, schools and hospitals were at a standstill. The Thai government confiscated properties belonging to the Mission as they were considered spoils of war. The Mission had never

⁶² Smith (1999), 98-200; Wells (1958), 161; Pongudom, P (1998), 90.

⁶³ Smith (1999), 201; Pongudom, P (1984), 89.

legally transferred the properties to the CCT, and, moreover, the CCT was not recognized as a legal entity. The government ordered all churches to close, schools and hospitals were taken over by the Japanese to become military hospitals.⁶⁴

The CCT was unable to do anything other than encouraging the Christians to remain firm in their faith. They pushed for legal recognition, and were finally granted the status of a religious organization from the government under the National Culture Council (สภากวัฒนธรรมแห่งชาติ) on April 14th, 1943.⁶⁵

After World War II, the new government established good relations with the United States, ended nationalistic campaigns and reintroduced freedom for religious activities. From 1944 onwards the important role of missionaries was recognized largely because the American Presbyterian Mission facilitated and helped to promote good relations between Thailand and the United States. Several missionaries who had worked in Thailand joined the U.S. civil service in key positions, such as economic and research officers, advisors on Thai matters to the U.S. government, and so on.⁶⁶

The government and people generally were well-disposed towards the U.S. This in turn made the work of the missionaries easier, and the churches and Christians more acceptable. The CCT, as it did not have the legal right of ownership, depended on the missionaries to request that the government return the properties which had been confiscated during the war. The CCT also depended on the missionaries to obtain funds from abroad to renovate their properties and restore the schools, hospitals, and churches

⁶⁴ The Scandinavian and Swiss communities cared for 'the English Church' (Christ Church, Bangkok – Anglican); Wells (1958), 160-163 ; Pongudom, P (1984), 92.

⁶⁵ Pongudom, P (1984), 93.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 102.

to their normal functions.⁶⁷ Thai churches and missionaries at that time had a very close relationship but the missionaries once more directed and led the CCT.

In 1945 some Thai church leaders requested that the CCT be allowed the freedom to work under its own direction.⁶⁸ Thai Christians had been running their own affairs during the Second World War, leading a fully independent Thai church. However, they were ignored and the missionaries invested time, people, and money in the schools and hospitals (social service work) as their tools to bring Thai people to Christ. The churches were given second priority as they were perceived as 'reapers', just to take care of and nurture new converts. The medical and educational institutions were the 'sowers', the soldiers, in fact 'the front'. As a result the institutions were better developed than the churches. The institutions were not successful in bringing Thai people to the Christian faith. Conflicts and power-play between the institutions and the churches within the CCT continue to the present day. It was not until 1957 that the American Presbyterian Mission in Thailand began to transfer its work to the CCT. Missionaries working under CCT became 'fraternal workers'.⁶⁹

In 1948 the CCT joined the World Council of Churches (WCC) with its social-ethical rather than evangelistic emphasis. Some leaders believed they should proclaim the gospel of Jesus, find converts, and establish new churches, rather than focussing on socio-economic development. In 1969, they joined independent Christian organizations and churches, which had entered Thailand since World War II, to establish a new Protestant organization called, 'The Evangelical Fellowship of Thailand (EFT)'.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Wells (1958), 163.

⁶⁸ Pongudom, P (1984), 106.

⁶⁹ Pongudom, P (1984), 137-139; Wells (1958), 173, 191-193.

⁷⁰ Wells (1958), 177; Smith (1999), 227; Kim (1980), 164; Pongudom, P (1984), 124.

In 1969, the EFT was recognized as a religious organization of the Protestant Christians under the Department of Religion of the Ministry of Education.⁷¹ The EFT was an umbrella organization given equal rights with the CCT. Formerly mission organizations outside the CCT had to request assistance from the CCT for visa quotas. The CCT lost this monopoly as the EFT now had its own visa quotas.⁷² The EFT, unlike the CCT, does not have centralized policies. Each organization under the EFT is entirely independent. This thesis will be concentrating on the CCT for its role from its inception by the American Presbyterian Mission and its continuing role in establishing a National Church in Thailand.⁷³

Since churches had been treated as of secondary importance, the development of church leaders was neglected. Hence, in 1966, the CCT set up a department to develop and support its pastors. The CCT had pastors for only half of its churches.⁷⁴ Although pastors are paid very little, most churches are unable to support one. In 1969, the CCT started a 'Pension 69' project which aimed at supporting the pastors by providing some financial security for them after retirement, but very few CCT churches have succeeded in being self-supporting.⁷⁵ Today it continues to serve Thai society through its hospitals, schools and universities.

2.2.2 Summary

The Thai Protestant church developed principally from the American Presbyterian Mission, which later evolved to be the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT), and

⁷¹ It was the most recent religious organization to be recognized by the Thai government; Anon.(1978),78.

⁷² Kim (1980),169.

⁷³ Nor will this thesis cover the work of the Baptists or some of the new independent Thai churches such as 'Hope of Bangkok' churches.

⁷⁴ CCT Statistics for 2000: 276 pastors for 540 churches.

⁷⁵ CCT Statistics for 2005: Out of 586 CCT churches, there are 233 self-supporting churches.

subsequently also the Evangelical Fellowship of Thailand (EFT). The CCT and EFT themselves are not two churches but two organizations. The EFT does not have centralized policies, each organization being independent within it. The CCT has centralized policies, coordinating the work of the member churches to strive for the goal of their common faith in Christ and promoting ministries to the people according to the freedom of religion stated in the country's constitution.

The CCT's objective is to develop the churches and help people become committed Christians. Its current constitution states its aim, 'to encourage the churches to be self-supporting, self-governing and self-evangelizing'.⁷⁶ Its work consists of church and community development.

From the historical overview it can be seen that the main objective of the three 'selfs' has never changed. It remains a challenge for today's Thai church leaders to develop strategies to achieve this objective. When, and only when, the churches in Thailand are self-supporting, self-governing and self-evangelizing, can the Thai churches truly become the Thai church for the Thai people.

⁷⁶ Church of Christ in Thailand (1998), 5.

Chapter Three: Dialogue in Thailand

The necessity for dialogue is discussed followed by a brief historical overview of inter-religious dialogue. A closer look is then taken at the formal dialogue between Christianity and *Theravāda* Buddhism in Thailand, ending with concluding remarks.

3.1 Why dialogue?

Dialogue, *sontana* (สนทนา) or *saewana* (เสวนา) in Thai, involves discussion, exchange of ideas, examining by argument. It is obvious, though often overlooked, that the two sides of a dialogue must use a common language for it to be fruitful. Both sides must be willing to give and to receive, to listen and to speak.

Donald K. Swearer¹ has rightly said that ‘Dialogue is the key to understanding other religions’. He considered dialogue as ‘an imperative mission in accordance with the doctrine of incarnation. The Christian continually realizes ... faith through genuine dialogue with his neighbour’.² Stanley J. Samartha also asserts:

First, God in Jesus Christ has Himself entered into relationship with men of all faiths and all ages, offering the good news of salvation. The incarnation is God’s dialogue with men. To be in dialogue is, therefore, to be part of God’s continuing work among us and our fellowmen. Second, the offer of a true community inherent in the Gospel, through forgiveness, reconciliation and a new creation, and of which the church is a sign and a symbol, inevitably, tends to dialogue... Third, there is a promise of Jesus Christ that the Holy Spirit will lead us into all truth. Since truth, in the Biblical understanding, is not propositional but relational, and is to be sought, not in the isolation of lonely meditation, but in the living, personal confrontation between God and

¹ Prof. Dr. Donald K. Swearer moved from Swarthmore College to Harvard Centre for World Religions in 2004. He was a missionary in Thailand 1957-1960. One of very few foreign scholars who can speak, read and write Thai.

² Swearer (1977), 47-50.

man, and men and men, dialogue becomes one of the means of the quest for truth. And, because Christians cannot claim to have a monopoly of truth, we need to meet men of other faiths and ideologies as part of our trust in and obedience to the promise of Christ.³

Understanding the religions of others is not merely for the sake of harmony and for the peace and survival of the human community, but for a real and deeper understanding of one's own religious faith. Swearer is one among many who have found that the religious convictions of others helped them grow in their understanding of their own faiths.⁴

3.2 Historical overview of inter-religious dialogue

In its early days the Christian message was communicated through dialogue. From its Hebrew base Christ's message was made intelligible to Greeks and pagans through the ministries of St. Paul, St. John, the early church Apologists, missionaries to the East and later, to the Germanic tribes of Europe. From this interchange 'Christmas day' falls at the winter solstice when a pagan festival was held, and Easter, the greatest of all Christian festivals, is named after a pagan goddess.⁵ Then, for centuries, dialogue became replaced by doctrine and dogmatism until once more, in the twentieth century, the importance of dialogue began to be understood.

As a first step to dialogue, there needs to be mutual appreciation between the partners to the dialogue. This initial step was taken at the first World Missionary Conference of Edinburgh in 1910. One of the statements made was:

The true attitude of the Christian missionary to the non-Christian religion should be one of true understanding and, as far as possible, of sympathy, ... that the missionary should seek for the nobler elements

³ Samartha (1971a), 138-139.

⁴ Similar views can be found in Davis (1970), 17; Hick (1973); Dewick (1953); Bouquet (1945).

⁵ Eostre, a goddess associated with spring.

in the non-Christian religions and use them as steps to higher things, that in fact all these religions without exception disclose elemental needs of the human soul .. and that in their higher forms they plainly manifest the working of the Spirit of God.⁶

In 1928 in Jerusalem the 1910 idea was repeated:

We welcome every noble quality in non-Christian persons or systems as further proof that the Father, who sent His Son into the world, has nowhere left Himself without witness.⁷

Sympathetic but possibly syncretistic views were checked by the Tambaram Conference in 1938, at which the absolutism and finality of Christianity were strongly emphasized by Hendrick Kraemer.⁸ Following this conference a variety of attitudes towards other faiths developed.⁹ Meanwhile, foundations for a common language, in which are included, some understanding of others' worldviews and not just the knowledge of syntax and vocabulary, were being laid. By 1969 there were twenty-one centres for the study of non-Christian religions established in different parts of the world.¹⁰

At the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), the declaration on the relationship of the Church to non-Christian Religions said:

The Catholic Church rejects nothing which is true and holy in these religions (e.g. Buddhism, Hinduism). She looks with sincere respect upon those ways of conduct and of life, those rules and teachings which, though differing in many particulars from what she holds and sets forth, nevertheless, often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men.¹¹

⁶ World Missionary Conference (1910), 'General conclusions'.

⁷ The International Missionary Council (1928), 490-491.

⁸ Dewick (1953), 44-56; Anderson (1961), 10-11; The International Missionary Council (1939), 'The Authority of the Faith'.

⁹ Attitudes towards other faiths can be found in Swearer (1977), 29-40; Thomas (1969), 19-28.

¹⁰ Samartha (1970), 173-179; Anderson (1961), 13.

¹¹ Walter (1966), 662.

However, at the World Council of Churches, it was not until 1970 that, for the first time, a consultation was held in Ajaltoun, Lebanon on inter-religious dialogue.¹²

3.3 Dialogue between Christianity and Theravāda Buddhism

The historical overview will be examined followed by principles for inter-religious dialogue in the Thai context.

3.3.1 Historical overview

After the Second World War, the general tendency and the theological ethos of the World Council of Churches (WCC) gradually shifted into the form of dialogue as the proper mode of interfacing with other religions. In Thailand dialogue between Christianity and Theravada Buddhism really began with the Sinclair Thompson Memorial Lectures at the Thailand Theological Seminary in Chiangmai. These Lectures were meant to continue Sinclair Thomson's work for, 'He had a lively interest in Buddhism and its frontier with Christianity.'¹³ These meetings, held over several years, had audiences consisting not only of students of religious studies or intellectuals but also of lay Christians and Buddhists.

The lectures began in 1962 with Malcom F Stuart's, 'Religion and the Individual' comparing and contrasting Buddhist and Christian views. Buddadāsa was invited in 1967 to give the fifth series, 'Christianity and Buddhism'. These will be considered in greater detail in chapter five. In 1973 the eighth and last series was presented by Swearer on 'A Theology of Dialogue'. Swearer dedicated his work to Buddadāsa who

¹² Samartha (1971b), 7-9.

¹³ Wells (1963), Preface.

helped inspire his lectures. In his foreword he wrote that his study of Buddhism had caused him to reconsider his Christian faith in a new light:

Indeed, it is not overstating the case to say that Buddhism has enlarged and deepened my own faith. ... My intention in these lectures is to point to some of the ways in which Christian thinking can be deepened and broadened by Buddhism. I shall not attempt the reverse task but hope that a Buddhist colleague will some day soon take up that endeavour. Similarly, I hope that these lectures will stimulate my Thai Christian colleagues to advance these beginnings into a thoughtful, mature theology with the promise of enriching the life and thought of the world Christian community.... Some of the most exciting moments in the history of Christian thought occurred through a serious encounter with Gnosticism, neo-Platonism and other non-Christian traditions. With few exceptions there has been little effort at a serious theological dialogue with Buddhism from the posture of openness rather than advocacy.¹⁴

At the end of the lectures in the 'Afterword: Implications for the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT)', Swearer made an impassioned plea to the CCT to dare to enter dialogue more completely. Among other suggestions he advocated a new Christian-Buddhist symbol ('Bo leaf' or 'wheel of *Dhamma*' with cross); the translating of some Christian scriptures into Pali; and liturgical chanting combining Theravada and Christian traditions. He concluded by saying, 'It is my fervent wish that they (the implications of his lectures) will bear fruit in these directions.'¹⁵

After this timely start, nothing much further happened locally in the realm of dialogue from the Protestant side, though Thai Catholics established a commission for inter-religious dialogue (คณะกรรมการศาสนาสัมพันธ์ *kanakammakarnsasanasampan*) which published a series of related books.¹⁶ Since the Millennium, however, the Thai church is beginning to reawaken to this facet of Christian endeavour. On the Buddhist side there was more

¹⁴ Swearer (1973a), Foreword.

¹⁵ Ibid, Afterword.

¹⁶ Most of the books published laid down the Catholics' guideline for inter-religious dialogue. The first book and the eighth and latest book by Father Choosak Sirisuth (บาทหลวง ชูศักดิ์ สิริสุทธิ์) were published in 1994 and 2001 respectively.

immediate interest aroused. It was not Christians but Buddhists who published Buddhadāsa's 1967 lectures, 'Christianity and Buddhism' in both Thai and English.

Two great Thai Bhikkhus, Buddhadāsa and Payutto, have contributed much to our understanding of their beliefs, and perhaps more significantly, to our understanding of how they perceive Christianity. Buddhadāsa was the first monk to say that Buddhism and Christianity are essentially, in the *phasatham*¹⁷ mode of speaking, one and the same. He was ready to declare:

Buddhists can accept all of the Christian texts, if they are allowed to interpret the *phasatham* in the Buddhist way so as it agrees with Buddhism.¹⁸

More controversially he said:

To a common person all religions have to be religions of faith. But to intellectuals when they use their wisdom to reach the core of religions, they will find that a person can not only be a Christian and a Buddhist at the same time, he can also be an adherent of Islam and of Brahmanical tradition at the same time as well.¹⁹

and explained:

It is because each selfishly interpret their own religion without allowing for adaptability, that makes it appear as if there are many religions instead of one universal religion. Neither Christ nor the Buddha established Christianity or Buddhism as religions. Christ merely told the way to reach the kingdom of God. The Buddha called the way he taught, '*Brahmacariyam*', not Buddhism.²⁰

To the Christian declaring 'through Christ alone', Buddhadāsa's statement is problematic. Buddhadāsa attempted to start a dialogue between Christianity and Buddhism, proving his points by quoting from both the Bible and the *Tipiṭaka*. Payutto, the great Buddhist academic, is less sympathetic to dialogue with Christianity and, among his numerous

¹⁷ See glossary, further explained in chapter four.

¹⁸ Buddhadāsa (1999c), 9.

¹⁹ Ibid., 49-50.

²⁰ Ibid., 21-25.

works, none is on dialogue. However, his book, *Threats to Buddhism in Thailand*,²¹ outlined both internal and external threats. Christianity is among the threats posed not only to Buddhism but also to the Thai nation. Payutto's perception of Christianity as a threat throughout history is understandable considering the circumstances outlined in chapter two.

3.3.2 Principles for inter-religious dialogue in the Thai context

No principles for inter-religious dialogue in the Thai context written by Thai Protestants or missionaries to Thailand have been found. Buddhādāsa is the only Thai who has expressed his view on this subject. Numerous writers have expressed principles for inter-religious dialogue in general, and in particular in the western context.²² Principles for inter-religious dialogue in the Thai context will be formulated based on these.

Five basic conditions for dialogue to take place and be fruitful can be identified. **Firstly**, there has to be mutual respect. Contact between the partners must be made on an equal footing, each holding the other in mutual esteem, not looking down on the other, but rather with an attitude that is willing to learn. The other person's faith must be respectfully recognised. **Secondly**, each partner must have a thorough knowledge of their own side of the dialogue. In other words, each must have a secure foundation of knowledge of their own religion. **Thirdly**, each must attempt to understand the other's faith and worldview.²³ They must listen with empathy and a genuine desire to hear and understand. They must do more than listen courteously, but must be listening in order to learn and not close their mind to something initially unpalatable. **Fourthly**, each must

²¹ Payutto (2002c).

²² See Swearer (1973a); Swearer (1977); Küng (1986)

²³ Some scholars termed them 'auto-interpretation' and 'hetero-interpretation'. Schmidt-Leukel, Köberlin & Götz (2001), 8-9.

present their own traditions and experience with integrity. The other partner to a dialogue will only be cheated if there is not complete honesty when views are presented. Nothing will be gained by misrepresenting the truth as one sees and understands it. **Finally**, it must be recognised that truth may be expressed differently in different contexts. For example, there is no point in taking a stand on whether Christmas falls in the summer or winter until the context of the northern or southern hemisphere is established. It must be recognised that the expression of truth varies in different contexts.

Buddhadāsa expressed four principles for inter-religious dialogue:

1) Two kinds of language, *phasakhon* and *phasatham*²⁴ co-exist in each religion. Problems and confusion exist within a religion or between religions when the two kinds of language used are not properly distinguished or accurately understood. Buddhadāsa uses *phasatham* to deal with the problems of understanding his own religion, the religions of others and inter-religious dialogue. According to Buddhadāsa:

The lack of *phasatham* understanding is the most dangerous enemy to any religion causing people to neglect religions, or to follow them foolishly as mere tradition. It even makes people switch continuously from one religion to another.... Because of the different interpretations of *phasatham*, conflicts arise between religions and within the same religion leading to denominational splits.

Because people do not understand the *phasatham* in their own religion, they then turn to other religions. If only they can understand their own *phasatham* they will love their own religion as their very own dear life.²⁵

2) To study and compare religions the outer covering, which all religions have, must be peeled off. The 'outer covering' includes religious practices, traditional teaching, later

²⁴ See chapter four (4.3).

²⁵ Buddhadāsa (1999b), 8-10.

doctrines, and so on. The original texts and commentaries (secondary texts) that do not contradict the original texts must only be used.²⁶

3) In comparing Buddhism with another religion, effort must be made to get behind key terms and find parallel ideas in them both. The truth behind the expression is the important point. So Buddhist *nibbāna* is emancipation from the burden of suffering and Christian salvation is emancipation from the shackles of sin. Buddhādāsa parallels God with *Dhamma*, judgment with *kamma*, and so on.²⁷

4) It must be accepted that there has to be adaptability and flexibility between religions. However, there first has to be an agreed principle enabling this to be done. Buddhādāsa explained:

For every nation there is an apostle - a principle to accept initially so that the comparative study of religion can fruitfully take place by agreement on the major things followed by others of lesser importance. An 'apostle' or 'one who announces the truth of God' exists in all religions. 'God' here is *phasatham* which needs to be accepted as a compromise that 'God' exists for all people according to their own understanding of 'God'.²⁸

Here Buddhādāsa is encouraging the acceptance of the other. This parallels the first principle that the other's faith must be respectfully recognised. Each faith has its own understanding of 'God' or 'truth'. Buddhādāsa outlined **two** areas where adaptation is needed. **Firstly**, Buddhādāsa called for, 'Flexibility or adaptability in the interpretations of religious words'. He explained:

If the interpretation of the words for whatever religion causes conflicts and is not for the common good of all people, that interpretation is not according to God's will or should be regarded as the work of 'Satan' or '*Mara* Lord'. Not holding on to each tradition, but allowing adaptability in the interpretation of *phasatham*, religions can then work together to find solutions for everyday life and can combat materialism – the true enemy of all religions. 'God' has given all the necessary principles but we have not correctly interpreted them.²⁹

²⁶ Buddhādāsa (1999b), 26-28.

²⁷ Discussed in chapter four.

²⁸ Buddhādāsa (1999b), 11-14.

²⁹ Buddhādāsa (1999b), 18-20.

This again relates to his understanding of there being two kinds of language, *phasakhon* and *phasatham*. It also partly echoes the point that an effort must be made to understand the terminology of the other's faith and worldview. **Secondly**, Buddhādāsa goes so far as to call for 'adaptability so as not to be reluctant to share the same common religious terminology.' Buddhādāsa asserted:

Christians will never allow the use of *nibbāna* for 'salvation'. They will find all sorts of arguments against it. For Christians, salvation has to come from God not from doing, especially not from practising the Buddhist Noble Eight-fold Path. For a Buddhist, on the other hand, the Noble Eight-fold Path, is *dhamma* and *dhamma* in fact is God. In their turn, Buddhists are reluctant to use the terms 'religion' and 'revelation'. Key important words which had been previously reserved by one religion should be used as common terms,³⁰ then other terms of lesser importance can also be used.³¹

This point needs to be treated with great circumspection. The fourth principle of integrity will be easily compromised without a thorough understanding of the terminology to be shared. For example, the use of *phrasangaraja* for bishop may be attacked from the Christian as well as the Buddhist side since the root meaning of the word bishop came from episcopos – overseer whereas the title *phrasangharaj* has a more kingly and absolutist connotation.³²

3.4 Concluding remarks

Inter-religious Dialogue is considered in some Christian circles with hostility. For some it conjures up many negative thoughts from 'watering down the faith' to 'syncretism'. This seems to be almost a denial of Christianity since Christianity among all religions is uniquely relational.³³ But some Christians understand that dialogue:

³⁰ Contrasting with Payutto's stance, see chapter five (5.3).

³¹ Buddhādāsa (1999b), 21-25.

³² *Raja* means king, *phrasangaraj* means the king of the *sangha*.

³³ See Schluter & Lee (1993).

Seeks to relate to others as neighbours and equals, regarding their beliefs as worthy of serious consideration and making an earnest effort to comprehend and appreciate them.³⁴

The Bible from beginning to end reveals God in dialogue with creation, with Himself and with humankind. God said, 'Let there be light'; 'Let us make humankind in our own image'; ... 'and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply'' Genesis 1:3, 26, 28; ... In Revelation 22:20 Jesus testifies to the Apostle John 'Surely I am coming soon.' In all rational creation, dialogue precedes the act of creating. At the most basic in an individual creation, one communicates with oneself to reach the decision 'I'll do it this way'. Dialogue, communication, is fundamental to life - as opposed to mere existence. It is preliminary to relationship. This is clear for Christianity from the very nature of the religion. One only has to consider Jesus Christ's summary of the law found in Matthew 22:34-40 and one can see it is based on relationships - love of God and love of neighbours. Christ declared that all the law and the prophets hung on these relationships.

Buddhism with its doctrine of *anattā*, could hardly be more different. And yet its teaching of *mettā*, and *ahimsā*, its search for *sacca*, *paññā*, and tranquillity produce a very Christ-like character. A thorough understanding of Buddhist tenets is of great significance in our search for fuller knowledge of God and His creation. Commitment to dialogue is essential. To enter other worldviews, an effort must be made to understand, and to be dialogical. If indeed all religions were the same, there would be no need for inter-religious dialogue.

³⁴ Mejudhon (1997), 6.

Part Two: Buddhists in dialogue - a closer look

Part two provides an understanding of how key Buddhist leaders interpret their own religion and perceive their Christian counterparts. The work of two venerated Bhikkhus: Buddhadāsa and Payutto, will be discussed. A working knowledge of the Thai Buddhist worldview and *nibbāna* is provided in appendix two.

Chapter Four: The Venerable Buddhadāsa, his distinctive interpretation of Buddhism and dialogue with Christianity

This chapter covers the radical¹ thinking of Buddhadāsa and his understanding of Christianity. To better appreciate Buddhadāsa's work, his life's goal will be discussed before examining the content of his teaching. The way Buddhadāsa reformed his own *Theravāda* tradition, going back to the texts of the *tipiṭaka* and his theory of two kinds of language: *phasakhon* and *phasatham* are explored. Then Buddhadāsa's interpretation of Buddhism - his treatment of the chief doctrines: *paṭiccasamuppāda*, *jitwang* and releasing one's hold on *tuagoo-konggoo* for the attainment of *nibbāna* are investigated. Next, Buddhadāsa's understanding of Christianity, in particular his equation of *dhamma* with God, *nibbāna* with the kingdom of God and his idea of redemption are considered. Finally, some reactions to Buddhadāsa's interpretation of Christianity are touched on.

¹ Radical in the sense that Buddhadāsa strove to return to the root, to the Buddha's original teaching found in the *tipiṭaka*.

4.1 Overview of Buddhādāsa and his goals in Life

Buddhādāsa (meaning ‘Slave of the Buddha’), 1906-1993, was devoted to dialogue between religions for mutual understanding and peace. His deep understanding of the Pali texts, especially the *Suttapiṭaka*, made him a lucid expositor of Theravada Buddhism. He complemented this with an extensive knowledge of other schools of Buddhism as well as of other major world faiths. Buddhādāsa described his goal in life as threefold²: **Firstly**, to encourage and help practitioners of Buddhism or any other religion to understand the deepest meaning of their respective religions; **secondly**, to encourage mutual understanding between religions, and **finally**, to help people escape from the bonds of materialism. The three goals are intricately linked:

If one does not understand the heart of one’s own religion, it will be impossible to strive for mutual understanding between religions. If each understands the heart of his or her religion, ultimately all will be beyond the bond of materialism. ...

How then can we understand each other? It is a matter that requires considerable thought. I think it is achievable if we all truly strive for it, if all concerned really reach into the heart of their own religion then finally it is all the same which is for the ultimate peace of humanity, even though the methods or way by which to reach the ultimate may be different.³

Buddhādāsa had a compassionate view of his own society. He saw it going astray and wanted to serve and correct it along Buddhist principles. For example, he estimated that the secular education system produced people who were adept at using their minds for their selfish ends but with no consideration of service to others. He felt people were being taught to serve the ‘I/me and my/mine’.⁴ Buddhādāsa realized that the majority of his countrymen had little notion of the Buddha’s true teachings. He pleaded for Thai

² Schmidt-Leukel, Köberlin & Götz (2001), 82-83.

³ Buddhādāsa (1984), 5-6 (Buddhādāsa’s preface for the publication).

⁴ Buddhādāsa (1990b), 45.

Buddhists to strive to understand the heart of Buddhism. Helping others to understand his master's teaching was his life's work. For Buddhadāsa, the traditional folk understanding of Buddhism was at the level of *phasakhon* where religious truths had evolved into superstitious beliefs and practices. One must, he said, practise Buddhism at the higher level of *phasatham*, to get to the heart of Buddhism. *Phasakhon* and *phasatham* are discussed in detail in section 4.3.

In response to his second goal in life, he delivered, in Thai, the 1967 Sinclair Thompson Memorial Lectures at the Thailand Theological Seminary in Chiang Mai.⁵ The lectures were later published as '*Christianity and Buddhism*'. Buddhadāsa prefaced his lectures by explaining his attitude:

In my way of thinking, all religions can meet on a common platform provided that there is an element of mutual broad-mindedness and goodwill. ... The Christ and the Tathagata never wanted to aggravate others, but to practise self sacrifice for the good of others.⁶

He gave an example of what he meant:

We should not speak in terms of whose religion is better, speaking in that way is madness. It is against the Buddhist principle of what is called 'māna (มานะ)'. We must stop having 'māna' of all three directions: māna that we are better than others, we are equals of others, or we are worse than others. Instead we should use the principle that - whatever we do, however we do it, we should strive to do as best we can, not with the motivation of trying to overcome others with attitudes of who is better, worse or equal. Just the best we can, then we will truly be a person who has religion. If one still tries to find niches for comparing, then one is not really holding on to religion because religions need to work together for unity among living creatures, ultimately striving for the good. Therefore, stop speaking of better, worse or equals.⁷

⁵ It is now a faculty of the Payap University under the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT).

⁶ Buddhadāsa (1999c), 14,4.

⁷ Buddhadāsa (1984), 272-273.

This would lead to a mutual understanding resulting in thoughts and deeds that did not aggravate others; non-aggravation would then lead to worldwide peaceful unity⁸:

There should be no reason for aggravating one another, for looking down on one another. There is nothing in religion to do that, because all the founders and the learned have been, and done good. It is the ignorant, the fools who came later and did not grasp the true meaning of the teachings and of the practices - they started the aggravation, insult and contempt of others. ... I hope that you all will try to seek understanding, for mutual benefits, so we can look at each other as friends and cooperate with each other. Looking at each other with misunderstanding brings nothing but harm to humanity.⁹

Buddhādāsa's work covers both textual studies and the central teachings of Buddhism. His textual studies are regarded as the official translations or Royal editions. His works explaining the understanding of Buddhism are numerous and include lectures which were recorded and transcribed. Several of his works have been translated into English and other languages.¹⁰

In 1980, Buddhādāsa received an Honorary Doctorate of Buddhism conferred by the Supreme Patriarch of the Thai *Sangha* from Mahachulalongkorn Buddhist University, the first given in its ninety-year existence.¹¹ After that, he received Honorary Doctorate degrees from six more Thai Universities. He was progressively awarded honorary clerical titles; from Phrakruindhapanyajarn (พระครูอินทปญฺญจารย) in 1932, then Phrathepwisutthimethi (พระเทพวิสุทธินเมธี) in 1961, and Phradhammakosachan (พระธรรมโกศาจารย์) in 1977. Buddhādāsa died on July 8th, 1993 at the age of eighty-seven having lived sixty-seven years as a monk.¹² Today his centre, Suānmok, has branches and

⁸ Buddhādāsa (1999c), 1.

⁹ Buddhādāsa (1984), 289-290.

¹⁰ For a Comprehensive bibliography of Buddhādāsa's work and translated works see Gabaud (1988), Sivaraksa (1990), 515-533.

¹¹ Swearer (1981), 2 (forward by Sulak Sivaraksa).

¹² Yongponkhan (2002), 166-167.

associations with many temples. The 2006 centenary celebrations of his birth were headline news in Thailand for months.

4.2) Buddhadāsa's reformation

From chapter one, we learnt that Buddhadāsa was the first who brought *lokuttaradhamma* and *nibbāna* back to the consciousness of Thai Buddhists since these concepts had been overlooked as a consequence of the influence of western science and technology. Buddhadāsa made the doctrine of *jītwang*, or *suññatā*, the hub of his interpretation of Theravāda Buddhism. *Jītwang* is a mind without moral impurities, a mind peaceful and imperturbable. Buddhadāsa had to re-interpret the traditional heart of Buddhist teaching, the *paṭiccasamuppāda*, and used the doctrines of *anattā* and *anicca*, to place *jītwang* at the centre of his teaching on the attainment of *nibbāna*. This will be covered in more detail as the chapter unfolds. To effect this change, Buddhadāsa had to re-define the relative importance of the contents of the *Tipiṭaka*, the Buddhist Pali Canon, placing central importance on the Buddha's words.¹³ He also emphasised rationality and *vipassanā* rather than *samādhi* and introduced his own interpreting method, that of *phasakhon* and *phasatham*.

Buddhadāsa worked to restore what he understood to be the original form of Buddhism. His great desire was for all humanity to see the relevance of this ancient teaching. The three pillars of Buddhism are the Buddha, the *dhamma* and the *sangha*. The *sangha*'s practices had become mixed with Brahmanism and animism. Buddhadāsa believed that a return to the Buddha's original teachings would be the only basis for reform. The Buddha's original teachings are to be found in the *Tipiṭaka*. Buddhadāsa regarded the

¹³ See appendix three: The *Tipiṭaka*.

Suttapiṭaka which record the Buddha's sermons and conversations as having the greatest authority. The *Vinayapiṭaka* followed, while the *Abhidhammapiṭaka*, the final section of the *Tipiṭaka*, Buddhadāsa considered secondary as these texts are not claimed to be the Buddha's words but are commentaries on them. Since he wanted his Master's words to be based on reason and science rather than superstition, and to be relevant today, he disregarded the 'Khuddaka' *Nikāya*, which contains many popular 'superstitious' Buddhist teachings. Buddhadāsa emphasized the *Digha*, *Majjima*, *Anguttara* and *Samyutta Nikāyas* in the *Suttapiṭaka*. These have the greatest number of direct quotes from the Buddha. The *Visuddhimagga* written by Buddhaghosa in the Fifth century C.E., considered by many to be the most important commentary on the Pali canon, was, however, a text Buddhadāsa avoided.

Another characteristic of Buddhadāsa was his emphasis on rationality. Rational argument with logic and reasoning has not traditionally characterized doctrinal studies of Buddhism in Thailand.¹⁴ This style is in fact so marked in Buddhadāsa's works that some western readers may follow his thoughts with greater ease than many of his fellow Thai monks. Buddhadāsa's thinking was both innovative and at the same time within a traditional framework. This presented a dilemma. He could not turn to the commentaries for support because he had side-lined them. He had to depend on logic and reason as he based his analysis on the Buddha's teaching. Yet he was at pains to be conservative. As Peter Jackson explains:

Reason has secondary place in Buddhist thought. Buddhism recognises suprarational forms of knowledge as being superior to mere reason. As a consequence it does not regard rational enquiry as being of ultimate significance.¹⁵

¹⁴ Jackson (1988), 91.

¹⁵ Jackson (1988), 38-39.

There were certain questions that the Buddha refused to answer, classing them as *abyakata*, and not contributing to the attainment of *nibbāna*. The Buddha taught us to start by asking ‘what causes suffering?’ and not with *abyakata* questions such as: When one dies, will one be born again? What part is born again? How is one born again? Is there an end of the world? Is heaven real? Where is heaven? Are *devatās* real? Metaphysics was beyond the Buddha’s concern. He spoke of the workings of the mind and morality for the reaching of *nibbāna*. For Buddhadāsa his desire to make his Master’s meaning known to rational and scientific minds was a source of tension. Buddhism puts great emphasis on practice and personal experience. As in modern science, theories have to be tested, so the Buddha’s teachings have to be personally tested by his followers. One may read of the *ariyamagga*, but its truth only becomes apparent as one moves along it. For the Buddhist the practice of meditation is of great importance to one’s progress. Meditation, of which there are two major types, is the main source of spiritual insight. Buddhadāsa de-emphasized *samādhi* with its *jhānas*, as they distract one from *nibbāna*. It was *vipassanā* leading to *jitwang* and ultimately to *nibbāna* that he extolled. Meditation rather than reason finally gives us *pañña*, leading to *nibbāna*. Buddhadāsa backed up his intellectual struggle to propound accurately his Master’s wisdom by living an exemplary, Buddhist life-style. By the end of his life he was revered by society, by everybody from His Majesty the King down. He was neither an ivory-tower scholar nor a remote holy man. In himself he combined both knowledge and practice of the *ariyamagga*.

4.3 Phasakhon-phasatham : Buddhadāsa’s distinctive method of interpretation

Buddhadāsa had a distinctive way of interpreting the texts of the *Tipiṭaka*. In his understanding there are two kinds of language: *phasakhon* and *phasatham*. How

Buddhādāsa used *phasakhon-phasatham*, his sources and criticisms of his concept will be respectively examined.

4.3.1 Buddhādāsa's use of *phasakhon-phasatham*

Buddhādāsa thought that the Buddha, like every great teacher, knew how to vary his language according to his audience. To uphold his interpretation of the Buddha's teaching, Buddhādāsa used this insight of there being two kinds of language:

Phasakhon is the language of the world, the language of the people who do not know *dhamma*. *Phasatham* is the language spoken by those who have gained a deep insight into the truth, which is the *dhamma*.¹⁶

Much of the Buddha's teaching was recorded as *vohāradesanā*. When the Buddha himself was speaking about everyday things, Buddhādāsa categorized it as *phasakhon*; when he was speaking about transcendent things he categorized it as *phasatham*. There were also places where the Buddha's words could be understood on two levels. The problem of putting spiritual insights into everyday language is common to all religions. It takes spiritual understanding to comprehend spiritual language in the same way as it takes mathematical understanding to grasp the shape and meaning of an equation which to the lay person is merely a row of symbols.

Buddhādāsa did not say that all the Buddha's sayings could be understood in two ways. Some texts were *phasakhon*, and he took them in the traditional interpretation. Other texts Buddhādāsa believed to be *phasatham* and they needed to be read with spiritual insight. Buddhādāsa used *phasakhon-phasatham* to elucidate and demythologize the Thai Theravada Buddhism of his time. When the Scriptures referred to deities and

¹⁶ Buddhādāsa (1972), 1.

demons, and to cosmological states, Buddhadāsa applied his *phasatham* interpretation. Then the demons or deities were reinterpreted and transformed into the psychological states of an individual. Buddhadāsa does not state that ‘heavens and hells’ do not exist but rather disregards them because they are not germane to the path leading to the attainment of *nibbāna* in this life:

True, heaven and hell of *phasakhon* are realms outside - though do not ask me where. And they are attained after death. But heaven and hell of *phasatham* are to be found in the mind and may be attained anytime depending on one’s mental state.¹⁷

Angelic beings, *devatā*, are transposed into humans:

If in this human world there are people who need not work, be anxious or bear heavy burdens but who can continually relax, play and be at ease then, according to the *phasatham* definition of ‘*thewada*’ as ‘a person free of suffering, who is beautiful, lives in ease and is glorious’, they can be called *thewada*. If they obtain this status of ease for a few hours, then they may burn with worries and unease like beings in hell. When they work at tiring duties they are humans. But in the hours they are sensually satisfied they are *thewada*.¹⁸

Heavens and hells are states of mind:

Heaven is in one’s breast, hell is in one’s mind, *nibbāna* exists in the human mind. What is meant by the word ‘world’ exists in the human mind.¹⁹

Metaphysics is not to be pursued as it will sidetrack a person:

The *dhamma* of the Lord Buddha does not talk about the period after death, as something important.²⁰

More importantly Buddhadāsa claimed, ‘*Nibbāna* must be something we can have in this life.’²¹ And, concerning any afterlife, he said, ‘If we rectify and correct this life then the next life will be rectified accordingly.’²²

¹⁷ Buddhadāsa (1982d), 61.

¹⁸ Buddhadāsa (1982a), 4 -5.

¹⁹ Buddhadāsa (1982c), 111.

²⁰ Buddhadāsa (1982d), 56.

²¹ Buddhadāsa (1982d), 56.

²² Buddhadāsa (1982c), 138.

The Layperson's Dhamma, reveals the extent of the revolution Buddhādāsa effected with his *phasakhon-phasatham* theory. He opened the *lokuttara* world to the *lokiya* lay world. The traditional view of the commentators was that there are two ways of living in the world, as a monk or as a householder. The monk's way, *lokuttara*, is superior. The responsibility of the householder is to support the monk. Now laypeople can hope for more than allowed them by tradition:

In Buddhādāsa's 'Phasa-tham' readings the world-negating outlook inherent in the traditional *lokuttara* standpoint is shifted to the establishment of the social world as a domain with religious importance.²³

Previously, while monks could hope to achieve *nibbāna*, all the lay people could do was to strive to better themselves in the next life. Buddhādāsa's compassion is for the whole of society:

Buddhism exists so as to allow everybody to live in the world triumphantly, one need not flee the world.²⁴

What is called *dhamma* or *sasana* exists so as to be the refuge for the people of the world. I do not want good people to discard the world but I want them to live in the world beneficially and without suffering.²⁵

Just as Buddhādāsa applied *phasatham* to the *Tipiṭaka* to expound his own religion, he used *phasatham* as his tool in inter-religious dialogue by applying *phasatham* to the teaching of other religions to understand them better.

4.3.2 Sources of the *phasakhon-phasatham*

Four strands of support for *phasakhon-phasatham* can be distinguished. The **first** coming from the *Suttapiṭaka*:

The Buddha laid down a principle for testing. By measuring against the suttas and comparing with the *vinaya*.²⁶

²³ Jackson (1988), 101-102.

²⁴ Buddhādāsa (1982c), 138.

²⁵ Buddhādāsa (1981b), 18.

²⁶ Buddhādāsa (1988a), 24.

The principle Buddhādāsa quotes comes from the *Mahāpari-nibbāna Sutta*²⁷. It must be remembered that the advice was given when the tradition was still an oral one. The concern of the monks was to memorize the scriptures and discern which language register a passage belonged to. The **second** strand is from the *Netti-Pakaraṇa*.²⁸ This writing, while neither in the Sri Lankan canon nor in the Thai *Tipiṭaka*, is part of the Burmese canon:

The *Netti-Pakaraṇa* teaches that the scriptures can be interpreted at two levels: the level of understanding the literal meaning of statements, and the level of understanding how those terms and statements point towards or are suggestive of *nibbāna*. The *Netti-Pakaraṇa* implored all interpreters of the Buddha's words to go beyond the immediate sense or presentation of a term to appreciate its underlying spiritual import.²⁹

Buddhādāsa's *phasakhon-phasatham* can be seen to be a modern way of understanding the *Netti-Pakaraṇa*. The **third** strand is found in the tradition that there are two levels to the Buddha's discourses. The *lokiya* path for householders, to promote their wellbeing. (In everyday understanding this has come to mean striving to be born in a better position at one's next rebirth.) The *lokkuttara* path leading to *nibbāna* was for *sangha* members only. Buddhādāsa expressed his views on levels of understanding as follows:

At the basic level *sammādiṭṭhi* (right view) is understanding which is correct in the respect that it effects beneficial development of this world in every way the *putthujana* want.

Sammādiṭṭhi of the middle level is understanding which is correct insofar as it effects beneficial development in worlds higher than those *putthujana* wish for, and which are called the other world, the world beyond or the next world and which are better than or different from this world.

As for the high level *sammādiṭṭhi* that denotes understanding which is correct in the respect that it effects crossing over or transcendence of each and every world in all ways, which is called the attainment of *nibbāna* or *lokkuttara* and which is interpreted as being beyond the world.³⁰

²⁷ Jackson (2003), 83 (quoted from *Digha Nikāya*, Vol.10/verse113/p102).

²⁸ The *Netti-Pakaraṇa* (เนตติปกรณ์) is attributed to Mahakaccana (พระมหาโกณฑายะนเถระ), an immediate disciple of the Buddha.

²⁹ Bond (1980), 19-22.

³⁰ Buddhādāsa (1999e), 136-137.

The **final** strand is from the *Abhidhammapiṭaka*, which systematically expresses two levels of understanding the Buddha's discourses. It speaks of two truths: *sammatisacca* and *paramatthasacca*, and two teaching methods, *puggaladhiṭṭhāna* and *dhammadhiṭṭhāna*. The lesser truth of *sammatisacca*, expressed in everyday language is that taught by the *puggaladhiṭṭhāna* method for householders. The highest truth, *paramatthasacca* is taught via *dhammadhiṭṭhāna*³¹ which is for the spiritually advanced, those with insight into the truth of *anattā*. It is for the *sangha*. *Phasakhon-phasatham* relates to *puggaladhiṭṭhāna-dhammadhiṭṭhāna*:

Phasakhon is speaking in the way of *puggaladhiṭṭhāna*, for those who cannot work out the deeper things.³²

Paramatthasacca is to be truly speaking in *dhammadhiṭṭhāna*, to reach to the ultimate point of those matters which ordinary people are still unable to see.³³

For Buddhadāsa, *phasakhon*³⁴ - *phasatham*³⁵ are contemporary Thai versions of *puggaladhiṭṭhāna* - *dhammadhiṭṭhāna*. Traditionally the entire *Suttapiṭaka* has been considered as *puggaladhiṭṭhāna*, and is called *vohāradesanā* because it is mainly 'vohāra'. Whereas, the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* has been considered as *dhammadhiṭṭhāna*, and is called *paramatthadesanā*, because it is predominantly expressed in terms of the constitutive elements of existence. For Buddhadāsa *puggaladhiṭṭhāna* is teaching in *phasakhon*, *dhammadhiṭṭhāna* in *phasatham*. He finds the two languages used not only in the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* but also in the *Suttapiṭaka*.

³¹ Teaching in the language of *khanda*, (aggregate). The doctrine of *anattā* interprets everything as being composed of naturally occurring elements or *khandhas* combining and functioning in accord with natural laws (*dhamma*).

³² Buddhadāsa (1982e), 55.

³³ Buddhadāsa (1976c), 297.

³⁴ 'Khon' or 'bukkhn' is the Thai word for the Pali term '*puggala*' meaning 'person or individual'. 'Phasa' means 'language'.

³⁵ 'Tham' is the Thai word for the Pali term *dhamma*.

4.3.3 Problems arising from the *phasakhon-phasatham*

Are there any problems with the *phasakhon-phasatham* theory? Theoretically there are none but one is created by Buddhadāsa himself. He first minimizes or de-emphasises to the point of rejecting the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* and then, at this point, uses it in his own support. This problem, however, is more imagined than real. What he rejects is the doctrines of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka*. What he is using in his own support is the mechanics of it. Besides, another great Thai Buddhist thinker, Payutto, in his book *Putthatham*, traces the *puggaladhiṭṭhāna – dhammadhiṭṭhāna* back to the Buddha's own words recorded in the *Suttapiṭaka*.³⁶

There is the practical difficulty of deciding when to understand the Buddha to be using *phasakhon* and when *phasatham*, and further, has the correct *phasatham* meaning been found. We can only say that it will take a person of spiritual discernment to apply *phasatham* appropriately and accurately. This should not be surprising considering the disputes of Christian or indeed Islamic scholars as they struggle with the meaning of their texts. For Buddhadāsa, a passage or *sutta* should be subjected to a *phasatham* reinterpretation if its traditional interpretation does not produce social and religious harmony. And a *phasatham* meaning is correct if it then promotes universal welfare and inter-religious harmony. Buddhadāsa said:

If the interpretation of the words for whatever religion causes conflicts and is not for the common good of all people, that interpretation is not according to God's will or should be regarded as the work of 'Satan' or 'Mara Lord'. Not holding on to each tradition, but allowing adaptability in the interpretation of *phasatham*, religions can then work together to find solutions for everyday life

³⁶ Payutto circumvents the difficulty caused by Buddhadāsa's demotion of the *Abhidhammapiṭaka* by tracing the sources of the distinction of *sammatisacca* and *paramatthasacca* the parental notion of *puggaladhiṭṭhāna – dhammadhiṭṭhāna* back to the *Suttapiṭaka*. Payutto (1995c), 55-56.

All religious leaders were born to co-operate with each other in making the world more perfect with the things that human beings should receive. Followers who do not follow their intentions by, for example, destroying others, are going out of line.

Problems and confusions exist within a religion or between religions when *phasakhon-phasatham* are not properly distinguished or appropriately understood.³⁷

The goal of Buddhism is *nibbāna*, the absolute truth, ultimate freedom and reality. The Buddha's teaching was solely concerned with this goal. In Buddhadāsa's view, if the *phasatham* interpretation leads to this goal then it is the correct one.

4.3.4 Criticisms of phasakhon-phasatham

Buddhadāsa's interpretation of the scriptures using *phasakhon-phasatham* has revolutionized Buddhist teaching and opened the way to *nibbāna* for ordinary lay people. By means of *phasakhon-phasatham*, together with the centrality of *jitwang*, Buddhadāsa has achieved a reformation in ideas. Their validity can be traced back to the *Tipiṭaka* and are based on it, making his teaching of great social as well as political concern. With the *sangha* under the control of the politicians and government, Buddhadāsa's critics have been showing social and political rather than doctrinal concern. He was criticized by several persons among them the former Thai Prime Minister Khukrit Pramot; Winay Siwakun³⁸ who wrote 'Buddhadāsa's Language' (ภาษาพุทธทาส)³⁹; and Phra-ananda Senakhan in *Heretical Teachings*⁴⁰ accused Buddhadāsa of heresy. Buddhadāsa was criticized for trying to destroy Buddhism. All these critics appeared to be concerned with

³⁷ Buddhadāsa (1999c) 2,4,8-10,18-19.

³⁸ Winay Siwakun (วินัย ศิวกุล) taught *Abhidhamma* at the Abhidhamma Foundation. He was also head of the society for the protection of Buddhism, a conservative traditionalist organisation.

³⁹ Found in Senakhan (1979).

⁴⁰ Senakhan (1979).

maintaining the status quo. Buddhadāsa, the radical conservative, answered these attacks through his treatment of the key Buddhist teaching of *paṭiccasamuppāda*, and its equivalent teaching of the Four Noble Truths.

4.4 Buddhadāsa's interpretation of cardinal Buddhist teachings

4.4.1 Buddhadāsa's teaching on *paṭiccasamuppāda*

Buddhadāsa wanted to return to what he understood to be the Buddha's original teaching. He saw that the teaching of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* had come, in Thailand, very close to denying the doctrine of *anattā* because the cycle went from birth to birth. What could be reborn but a 'self'? Belief in rebirth was, for Buddhadāsa, the false doctrine of *sassatadiṭṭhi*, that there is an eternal self. Buddhadāsa uses *phasatham*, interpreting 'birth' to mean the arising of 'self' or 'selfishness' in a person, not a physical birth. Buddhadāsa warns his followers:

Be very careful about the 'next life'. One slight slip will make it *sassatadiṭṭhi* of the Brahmins, believing that when one has died one will be born again.⁴¹

Describing what he saw as careless teaching:

A person's *kilesa* in a previous life effect kammic results in this life... those kammic results in this life then cause *kilesa* to arise anew in this life, which then effects kammic results in a subsequent life. When *paṭiccasamuppāda* is taught like this it becomes a teaching about *attā*. It becomes a teaching that there are *attā*, selves, beings and individuals.⁴²

Buddhadāsa, argues cogently against the interpretations taught for over 1,000 years and specifically against the interpretation of Buddhagosa in the *Visuddhimagga*:

⁴¹ Buddhadāsa (1982d), 57.

⁴² Buddhadāsa (1981a), 74.

Teaching *paṭiccasamuppāda* in such a way that there is a self persisting over a series of lives is contrary to the principle of Dependent Origination and contrary to the principles of the Buddha's teaching.⁴³

Buddhadāsa firmly puts forward his own understanding of *paṭiccasamuppāda* based solely on the Buddha's teaching – i.e. not using the commentaries. He goes so far as to say that the standard teaching – linking past, present and future lives (that is three births) is in fact Brahmanism and not Buddhism at all:

There is no way that Buddhists can have a self or a soul or *atman* or any other such thing. If anyone consciously attempts to explain *paṭiccasamuppāda*, the heart of Buddhism, in terms of three births, that person would be effectively destroying Buddhism.⁴⁴

In fact, whether it was done in ignorance or deliberately, Buddhadāsa believed this false teaching explains the disappearance of Buddhism from India:

I think that Buddhism disappeared from India because the followers of Buddhism began to interpret the principles of Buddhism incorrectly, explaining *paṭiccasamuppāda*, as a form of having self... Buddhism became simply an appendage of Hinduism.⁴⁵

Buddhadāsa is very vehement about this:

Buddhism is not eternalism – it does not mention beings or individuals or self. There is no person who spins around in the cycle of birth death and rebirth. Buddhism has no being or person, but yet it turns out that in the form of *paṭiccasamuppāda* which covers a span of three births, there is a being, a person who is caught up in the spin. This is, indeed, the dissolution of Buddhism.⁴⁶

Buddhadāsa's *phasakhon-phasatham* theory is very important to his understanding of *paṭiccasamuppāda*:

We must appreciate the great problem which faced the Buddha in trying to explain this teaching, which is not easily understood by ordinary people. The language of relative truth (*phasakhon*) is for the teaching of morality to ordinary people; the language of ultimate truth (*phasatham*) is for

⁴³ Buddhadāsa (1992b), 7.

⁴⁴ Buddhadāsa (1992b), 67.

⁴⁵ Buddhadāsa (1992b), 67-68.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 68.

teaching absolute reality to those who have only a little dust in their eyes, so that they may become noble disciples.⁴⁷

If we interpret *paṭiccasamuppāda* according to *phasakhon*, there will arise confusion and lack of understanding. For example: the Buddha became enlightened at the base of the Bodhi tree. His enlightenment was the destruction of ignorance – ignorance was extinguished. Because ignorance was extinguished, volitional impulses were extinguished; because volitional impulses were extinguished, consciousness was extinguished; because consciousness was extinguished, mentality / materiality was extinguished. And why then didn't the Buddha die? ... With the extinguishing of ignorance, *sankhara* were extinguished, that is the factors giving rise to consciousness and mentality/materiality. Why didn't the Buddha die at the base of the Bodhi tree at that moment? Because the words relating to *paṭiccasamuppāda* are in the *phasatham*. The word "extinguish" is used in the sense of ultimate truth. It does not mean the birth or death of the flesh.⁴⁸

Buddhadāsa does not see 'birth' in the *paṭiccasamuppāda* as physical birth. He understands it in *phasatham* to be the arising in a person of the sense of self. Another example is his explanation of two meanings for *jāti*:

As far as birth from a mother's womb is concerned, we are born only once and that's the end of it. After that there are many, many more births; many births in one day, even. This means *being born because of attachment* – the feeling that I am something or other. This is called one birth.⁴⁹ (Italics mine).

Clearly birth in *phasatham* is the birth of attachment and death is the death of attachment.⁵⁰

In his book on *paṭiccasamuppāda*, Payutto accepts Buddhadāsa's ideas, without naming Buddhadāsa, but does not fully endorse them. Payutto quotes from the *Majjhima-nikaya* and the *Samyutta-nikaya* in support of one physical birth theory that is the *dhamma* language understanding of 'birth' but says:

⁴⁷ Ibid., 5.

⁴⁸ Buddhadāsa (1992b), 58-59.

⁴⁹ Buddhadāsa (1992b), 56.

⁵⁰ A parallel idea in Christianity may be dying daily to sin.

Although this interpretation of *paṭiccasamuppāda* must be understood in its own right, we nevertheless do not discard the pattern established by the standard model.⁵¹

One of the grounds for Buddhadāsa's vehemence on the importance of correct teaching of *paṭiccasamuppāda* is that if the teaching of the three lifetimes is allowed, then the follower cannot practice this teaching. But all the Buddha's teaching is to be put into practice, especially this teaching, the profound heart of Buddhism.

The law of *paṭiccasamuppāda* is not simply a matter of inflated study and memorizing as most people tend to say. Rather, it must be a matter of skilful practice: mindfulness (*jītwang*) must be present to control feelings when sense contact arises.⁵²

Buddhadāsa further demonstrates how *paṭiccasamuppāda* is the heart of Buddhism, by showing that it is the Four Noble Truths in a more detailed version and how they are experienced in daily life⁵³ :

Paṭiccasamuppāda in the order of arising is equal to the Noble truths of suffering and its cause. *Paṭiccasamuppāda* in the order of cessation is equal to the Noble Truths of the end of suffering and the way to end suffering.⁵⁴

Buddhadāsa's interpretation brings to the fore the problem of the 'good' suffering and the 'evil' flourishing.⁵⁵ Since he concentrates on the arising of self in this present life, the here-and-now (ที่นี่ - เดี๋ยวนี้), what happens to *kamma* from the past and in the future? Just as hell was used as a deterrent to anti-social behaviour in the west, so was the retribution of *kamma* used in the east. No wonder Buddhadāsa's critics accused him of disturbing the foundations of society. Buddhadāsa does not deny the working of the law of *kamma* but

⁵¹ Payutto (1999a), 43.

⁵² Buddhadāsa (1992b), 8.

⁵³ Buddhadāsa (1982f), 111.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 62.

⁵⁵ Psalm 73 expresses this same problem.

nor does he explain how it is effected. Like the Lord Buddha, his master before him, he does not answer metaphysical questions. The traditional solution was to connect a subliminal consciousness with the five aggregates:

Traditionally, consciousness in a subterranean or *bhavaṅga* mode is regarded as forming the basis of individual identity. In order to remain consistent with the doctrine of *anattā* and avoid the implication that the rebirth doctrine denotes that there is an entity which reincarnates in successive lives, this subterranean mode of consciousness is described as not being a self-existing entity or self. Rather it is described as being a process with a definite origination and end. It is maintained that the *bhavaṅga* consciousness underlying each successive life is distinct and discrete, beginning at conception and ending at death.⁵⁶ The actual links between successive births (i.e., between the cessation of one *bhavaṅga* condition at death and the origination of the next *bhavaṅga* at conception) is called the *paṭisandhivīññāna*. It is this *paṭisandhi* consciousness which transfers the *kammic* impressions or *saṅkhāra* which determine an individual's character or fate from one existence to the next.⁵⁷

Buddhādāsa has made the false idea of self and selfishness (I and mine) the equivalent of birth. Without the idea of self and selfishness one finds true happiness while 'Birth is perpetual suffering'⁵⁸. If Buddhādāsa is right, then the question of why the wicked seem to prosper and the good to suffer is wide open again⁵⁹. He is, in fact, overlooking many instances in the *Suttapiṭaka* of references to earlier lives⁶⁰. Buddhādāsa said:

Just what is this rebirth? What is it that is reborn? The birth referred to is a mental event, something taking place in the mind, the nonphysical side of our make-up. This is birth in *phasatham*.⁶¹

The word 'birth' merely means a single change of thought about 'I' and 'mine'. It is one birth if we think like a thief and are born a thief and it is another birth the moment we have returned to thinking like a normal person and so have been born as a person.⁶²

⁵⁶ This can perhaps be viewed as one's DNA.

⁵⁷ Jackson (2003), 112.

⁵⁸ '*dukkha jati punapunnam*' ; Buddhādāsa (1974a), 1.

⁵⁹ There are in fact two separate issues involved here : Firstly, rebirth and science (Can, for example, DNA be one scientific explanation?) and secondly, the moral issue of the good suffering and the evil prospering.

⁶⁰ See Jackson (2003), 113-114 for examples of explicit references to rebirth found in the *Suttapiṭaka*.

⁶¹ Buddhādāsa (1974a), 4 -5.

⁶² Buddhādāsa (1982d), 60.

At the other end of the spectrum, declaring:

To die means that 'I' and 'mine' die completely.⁶³

In the words of an old saying, '*nibbāna* is to die before dying' ... That is, the *kilesa*- the causes of the feeling that there is an 'I' or a 'mine'- it is they that die.⁶⁴

It can be seen that this is revolutionary, for without the idea of physical rebirth, where is the social control exercised by *kamma* – or the social care-less-ness which is excused by the doctrine of *kamma*? (I need not help – they deserve their suffering - it is their *kamma*.) Buddhadāsa said:

At any time there exists the idea I/mine, at that time there exists birth, suffering and the cycle of *saṁsāra*. The 'I' is born, endures for a moment, then ceases; is born again endures for a moment and again ceases- which is why the process is referred to as the cycle of *saṁsāra*.⁶⁵

A person has a physical birth only once, and finally dies just once, but they can have mental birth and extinction many times. Even in a single day there can be many cycles of birth and extinction... and each time it, the mental birth, is *dukkha*. For this reason, the dhammic doctrines which mention *dukkha* denote mental *dukkha*.⁶⁶

Since ending the delusion of selfhood is to be free of the rebirth which causes *dukkha*, it is also to be freed of *dukkha*, which means reaching *nibbāna*. For Buddhadāsa, *dukkha*, the condition from which Buddhism seeks release, only follows from the birth of self-centredness, not from physical birth. This is different from the traditional explanation of *dukkha* in the *Visuddhimagga* where 'birth' in the *paṭiccasamuppāda* is 'physical birth':

With birth as condition there is ageing and death, and sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair; thus there is the arising of this whole mass of *dukkha*.⁶⁷

⁶³ Buddhadāsa (1978), 157.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 157.

⁶⁵ Buddhadāsa (1978), 7.

⁶⁶ Buddhadāsa (1968), 9.

⁶⁷ Buddhadāsa (1982f), 81 quoted from *Visuddhimagga*, XVII, 2.

Buddhadāsa's idea of *jītwang* has to be remembered. He believes *jītwang* to be the natural state of mind for humanity. In this state one is free from the delusion of selfhood. To end the delusion of selfhood is to be freed from *dukkha*. To be freed from *dukkha* is one definition of *nibbāna*. Traditional Buddhist thought sees the material world in a negative way, as delusion, impermanent and *dukkha*. For Buddhadāsa:

World in *phasatham* refers to the worldly – *lokiya* mental state, the worldly stage in the scale of mental development... the condition which is impermanent, changing, unsatisfactory *dukkha*... Hence it is said that world is the unsatisfactory condition *dukkha*; the unsatisfactory condition is the world.⁶⁸

It seems Buddhadāsa has done two revolutionary things. **First** he has made this life of supreme importance for everyone (not just for monks), by teaching that everyone is capable of reaching *nibbāna*, freedom from *dukkha*. **Secondly** he has diminished the role of *kamma* as a social restraint. A conservative hierarchy would oppose him on both counts. Buddhadāsa said:

If we can master this kind of birth of 'I' here and now, we will also be able to master the birth that comes after physical death. So let's not concern ourselves with the birth that follows physical death. Instead let us concern ourselves seriously with the birth that happens before physical death.⁶⁹

Buddhadāsa clearly does not deny physical rebirth but obviously believes it to be beside the point. There is only the present in which to act. His sole concern is with the attainment of *nibbāna*. He does not digress into speculation. Jackson remarks:

Buddhadāsa does not in fact completely deny the actuality of rebirth. What he does deny is the relevance of literal rebirth to the spiritual enterprise of Buddhism.⁷⁰

Scriptural support for Buddhadāsa's this-worldly emphasis is found in the *Potthapadasutta*:

⁶⁸ Buddhadāsa (1972), 15.

⁶⁹ Buddhadāsa (1974a), 19.

⁷⁰ Jackson (2003), 120.

Behold, *Poṭṭhapāda*, these points we cannot determine, whether beings after death either continue to exist or do not continue to exist.⁷¹

And when queried, the reply was:

Behold, *Poṭṭhapāda*, because that is not meaningful, is unrelated to the *dhamma*, is not the start of *brahmacariya*, does not proceed for the sake of tiredness of worldliness, for extinction, for peace, for higher knowledge, for realization, for *nibbāna*. Thus for these reasons we can not determine.⁷²

Buddhadāsa's profound re-reading of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* puts even greater moral responsibility onto each individual being. He leaves the whole question of one's kammic inheritance pending. He even posits a possible 'conspiracy theory' for the teachings coming from the Third Buddhist Council:

There may have been rebellious traitors acting as destructive agents inside Buddhism who deliberately and maliciously explained *paṭiccasamuppāda*, the foundation of Buddhism, incorrectly. That is, so that it would become *sasatadiṭṭhi* found in Hinduism, or in other words, change into Brahmanism... If there were such harmful intentions it would mean that someone must have made up an explanation of *paṭiccasamuppāda* in order to create a channel for the *attā* doctrine to come into Buddhism. And then Brahmanism would swallow Buddhism... This is a supposition from the view that there could have been harmful influences within Buddhism.⁷³

Buddhadāsa turns his critics' accusation against them. He holds firmly to the key teachings of *anattā*, *anicca*, *dukkha* and *nibbāna* but does not elevate the Buddhist scriptures above reason. His reinterpretation of rebirth goes against some scriptures as has been pointed out,⁷⁴ but not against the key doctrines:

For Buddhadāsa, logical consistency with the doctrinal fundamentals of Buddhism is the most important determinant of authoritative interpretations of the teachings.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Jackson (2003), 121-122 quoting from *Poṭṭhapadasutta*, *Digha Nikaya*, Vol.9/verse 292/p.270.

⁷² Jackson (2003), 122 quoting from *Poṭṭhapadasutta*, *Digha Nikaya*, Vol.9/verse 292/p.270.

⁷³ Buddhadāsa (1981a), 77.

⁷⁴ See foot note 60.

⁷⁵ Jackson (2003), 114.

As with others' scriptures, the Buddhist scriptures can bear various interpretations. Buddhadāsa is at pains to give a consistent rational interpretation, avoiding mythological interpretations.

4.4.2 Buddhadāsa's teaching on *jitwang* and releasing one's hold on *tuagoo-konggoo* for the attainment of *nibbāna*

Jitwang and *tuagoo-konggoo*, are key to Buddhadāsa's unique teaching on the attainment of *nibbāna* which opened the *lokuttara* world to the *lokiya* world. Buddhadāsa's coining of the terms *jitwang* for *suññatā* and *tuagoo-konggoo* for his interpretation of *anattā* will be investigated.

The two meanings of *suññatā* must first be noted. **The first** meaning is concerned with the right view. That is the mind free from illusion. This sense of *suññatā* is commonly called the voidness or emptiness of the world: the non-substantial, phenomenal character of reality – the fundamental void underlying being. **The second** meaning concerns the individual being, *benjakhandā*, empty of *kilesa*: being devoid of moral impurities, lusts, evil dispositions and *kamma*. It is being in a state of mental equilibrium, *upekkhā*, wherein one is neither attracted nor repelled by anyone or anything. Tradition emphasises the first meaning, Buddhadāsa emphasises the second. For Buddhadāsa, *suññatā*, the state free of self, of emptiness, is equivalent to the term he coined, *jitwang*. *Jitwang* is a mind at peace and is the foundation of *nibbāna*. *Jitwang*, the freed-mind, is one with the freedom of *nibbāna*. Buddhadāsa wanted everyone to enjoy the benefits of escape from suffering:

Full benefits have never been realized from interpretations of *anattā* and *attā*. They must be reinterpreted to be fully beneficial and useful for everyone in restraining suffering.⁷⁶

Anattā should be translated as ‘not a self’. Do not translate *anattā* as ‘non-self or nothing’. There is so much that we see as a self but in reality it is not a self. If one perceives a self, one will love it and eventually be led into *kilesa*. *Anattā* is the middle way between two extremes: the extreme of *attā* and the extreme of not having *attā*. There is a self that is not a self. It sounds strange that we have a self that is not a self but it is the truth. ... To conclude, in Buddhism if one holds onto the five *khandas* as a self, *dukkha* will immediately follow and that is the foolishness of not knowing *anattā*. *Anattā* is the key to end *dukkha*, to get rid of selfishness by not holding onto *tuagoo-khonggoo*.⁷⁷

To reach *nibbāna*, one needs to realize that one is not an *attā* but *anattā*. Therefore Buddhadāsa taught not to hold on to *tuagoo-konggoo*.⁷⁸

The three types of *taṇhā* can be grouped into two: *kāma-taṇhā* as *kam* (กาม) and, *bhava-taṇhā* and *vibhava-taṇhā* as *pop* (ภพ). ... *Kam* is the foundation on which we hold onto the *khonggoo* and *pop* is the *tuagoo*. If there is *khonggoo* there will also be *tuagoo* hiding deep beneath it. Without realising, humans are the victims and slaves of what we perceive as *tuagoo-khonggoo*.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Buddhadāsa (1968), 14.

⁷⁷ Buddhadāsa (1999a), 143, 153- 154.

⁷⁸ Buddhadāsa makes inspired use of Thai language. The power of the words, ‘*tuagoo-konggoo*’, needs some explanation. Thai society is one of relationships rather than of law. On meeting a stranger at a function, there is a social catechism to establish the correct relationship, seniority or status. ‘How old are you?’ may be asked subtly, ‘In which of the twelve year cycle were you born?’ followed by, which school / university did you attend? What did you study? Where do you work? Your jewellery and accessories will be assessed for value. All these circumstances will have a bearing on the vocabulary to be used in the subsequent conversation so as to avoid social faux pas. Pronouns are especially complex: ‘I’, speaking to the King is ‘*kapraputtachaofala-ongtuliprabatt*...’. A monk uses ‘*attama*’ (อาตมา) for ‘I’. There are a dozen more expressions for ‘I’ down to ‘*goo*’ which is now considered unpolished slang. (กู - *yarb*) but it is this very word ‘*goo*’ that Buddhadāsa uses for ‘I/me’ (*tuagoo*) and ‘my/mine’ (*khonggoo*). His use of this expression made a powerful impact on his Thai audiences, which is lost in translation. Moreover, it can be seen how the idea of ‘self’ is very transitory in Thai culture. In English, to use one’s given name for ‘I’ is considered childish but in Thai it is normal for a grown person to use his or her name referring to him or herself. A woman will frequently use the word ‘*noo*’ (หนู - mouse) for herself. The doctrine of *anattā* seems embedded in the language; given names and surnames are seldom used. One may know another person for quite some time without ever hearing their proper name because of the wide use of nicknames such as: *Daeng* (แดง - red) or *Dum* (ดำ - black) from a baby’s skin colour; *Noi* (น้อย) or *Lek* (เล็ก) meaning small; sometimes just the last syllable of a longer given name; these are often not gender specific. Apart from this diminution of the self as a named entity, there is the common practice of using one’s relationship to the person addressed in place of ‘I’. For example, one hears: ‘Now your teacher is going to tell you about fractions.’; ‘Grandpa doesn’t like that.’; ‘Your lecturer will be away next week.’; ‘the doctor doesn’t know.’

⁷⁹ Buddhadāsa (1999i), 66-71.

Don't identify as *tuagoo-konggoo*; act with clear awareness and there will be no suffering.⁸⁰

The sense of self, *tuagoo-konggoo*, has to be eliminated for one to achieve *jitwang*, and ultimately *nibbāna*. Buddhadāsa describes *jitwang*:

Jitwang is the state in which all the objects of the physical world are present and being perceived as usual but none of them is being grasped or clung to as mine. Thus *jitwang* is not a vacuous mental state. It is not void of content. All objects are there as usual and the thinking processes are going on as usual, but they are not going the way of grasping and clinging with the idea of *tuagoo-konggoo*.⁸¹

Jitwang is a condition in which one does not cling to anything, is not anything, does not feel that one gets anything or that one gets to be anything.⁸²

Buddhadāsa explained:

When the mind is freed it is free from suffering, free from dogmatic clinging and attachment.⁸³

The *suññatā* of the Buddha means the absence of anything that we might have a right to grasp at and cling to as an abiding entity or self... The world is described as *khwamwang* (කුමාර - emptiness) because there is nothing whatever that we might have a right to grasp at. We must cope with an empty world, with a mind that does not cling.⁸⁴

Jitwang is of basic importance:

I consider a mind freed from *kilesa* to be fundamental... Normally the mind is essentially free from *kilesa*; hence our only spiritual duty is to wait and block their way with mindful wisdom. Don't give *kilesa* the chance to arise. Let there continually be the freed-ness of the fundamental, original freed-mind (*jitwang*).⁸⁵

The key to maintain *jitwang* is mindfulness:

The Lord Buddha said '*sun nato evehassa mogharaja sadasato*' – 'One should be a person with mindfulness, always seeing the world in the condition of being *khwamwang* – empty or a freed-thing'. ... Whoever sees the world as *khwamwang* will not have suffering because they will

⁸⁰ Buddhadāsa (1974a), 15.

⁸¹ Buddhadāsa (1974a), 6-7.

⁸² Buddhadāsa (n.d. -e), 78.

⁸³ Buddhadāsa (1979), 83.

⁸⁴ Buddhadāsa (1988a), 64.

⁸⁵ Buddhadāsa (1978), 37.

see the world as something completely without birth and extinction, and so there cannot be suffering.⁸⁶

Having mindfulness is to wait and be cautious with every inward and outward breath. Don't get lost in attached clinging, to having, taking and being.⁸⁷

Buddhadāsa sees *jītwang* as the natural state of mind of a person. When the idea of self arises, then the mind is tainted with *kilesa*. Since *kilesa* are part of the cycle of *saṃsāra* one is then bound to rebirth. The object is to reverse, undo or better still prevent the arising of *kilesa*. Nothing exists as a 'self' and so it cannot be eradicated or cut out. The arising of a notion has to be prevented or extinguished. This can be done by constant mindfulness, the practice of meditation.⁸⁸ Buddhists need to embark on the *ariya-aṭṭhaṅgika-magga* leading to *nibbāna*. To end *dukkha* and to arrive at the right view of *anattā*, to no longer hold onto *tuagoo-khonggoo*, Buddhists exercise their minds, which is called *kammathan* (กรรมฐาน), in other words *anapanasati*⁸⁹ - the *samādhi* element of the noble path. There are incorrect views about *anapanasati* which can hold one back from *nibbāna*. The peace and supreme bliss experienced on the way is not to be held onto:

To practise the mind (จิต) in the right way, your soul (จิตใจ) will calm down to a calmness that is peaceful in a blissful way. A blissfulness that those who have never experienced such bliss will become engrossed (หลงใหล) in. A supreme kind of happiness which surpasses happiness of the sensual realm. It naturally follows that if one can overcome the higher levels of happiness (สุขเวทนา), the lower level of happiness will no longer become a problem. Even at the highest level of happiness, one needs *paññā* to see that it is still only *māyā*, and is not worthy of holding onto.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Buddhadāsa (1982b), 29.

⁸⁷ Buddhadāsa (n.d. -e), 85.

⁸⁸ The Christian parallel perhaps is the 'practice of the presence of God' (see chapter nine).

⁸⁹ *Anapanasati* (อานาปานสติ) consists of *kāyānupassanāsatipaṭṭhāna* (กายานุปัสสนาสติปัฏฐาน - mindfulness as regards the body), *vedanānupassanāsatipaṭṭhāna* (เวทนานุปัสสนาสติปัฏฐาน - mindfulness as regards feelings), *cittānupassanāsatipaṭṭhāna* (จิตตานุปัสสนาสติปัฏฐาน - mindfulness as regards thoughts), and *Dhammānupassanāsatipaṭṭhāna* (ธรรมานุปัสสนาสติปัฏฐาน - mindfulness as regards ideas or *Dhammā*).

⁹⁰ *Māyā* sums up the fact that existence is really *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anattā*; Buddhadāsa (1999i), 133.

A good person (คนดี) will have *dukkha* that associates with good, whereas the evil person (คนชั่ว) will have *dukkha* that associates with evil. Therefore to be neither good nor bad is to be without *dukkha*:

If you have *boon* you will have *dukkha* of the *boon* type which is different from the *dukkha* of those with *bap*, but both *boon* and *bap* are still *dukkha*. One is still carrying a burden in one's heart. The difference perhaps is that the weight the evil person is carrying is in flames but the weight a good person is carrying is aromatic and cool, but that weight is unperceivably heavy. Happiness is still a weight to carry. Happiness is still based on change, on various emotions, all of which are *māyā*. It is far better to have *jitwang*, to be free from holding onto the good and the bad. Because when one is holding onto them, there is *dukkha*. This is what I mean by not want anything, not holding onto *khonggoo*, and not be anything, not holding onto *tuakoo*.⁹¹

Not everyone agrees with Buddhādāsa about the basic purity of the human mind. In the discussion of *paṭiccasamuppāda* and what it is that causes rebirth, the idea of subconscious *kilesa* is posited. Buddhādāsa does not go into that. All he claims is that *jitwang* is the fundamental state of the conscious mind. This potentially clashes with the doctrine of *kamma*. More obviously there is the question of the definition of *nibbāna*. Can a pure consciousness with a defiled subconscious be said to have reached *nibbāna*? Just how pure – free of self - must one's consciousness be? Buddhādāsa's opponents use the *Visuddhimagga*, which Buddhādāsa does not rely on, to support their arguments:⁹²

The defilements – *anusayakilesa* that are the roots of the round of rebirth inherent in one's own aggregates - *khandhas* not fully understood by insight from the instant those aggregates arise.⁹³

These things are called proclivities – *anusaya* since, in consequence of their pertinacity, they ever and again tend to become the conditions for the arising of ever new sensuous greed, *kammaraga*, and so on.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Buddhādāsa (1999i), 133, 137-138.

⁹² The Christian parallel perhaps is the concept of 'Original sin'.

⁹³ Buddhagosa (1979), 83. (*Visuddhimagga*, XXII)

⁹⁴ Buddhagosa (1979), 60. (*Visuddhimagga*, XXII)

Buddhādāsa recognizes the three levels of nibbanic attainment ⁹⁵ : **firstly**, *Tadanganibbāna* is the transitory experience of a moment when one's mind entertains no idea of *tuagoo–konggoo*. One is, for that moment, peaceful and free from all *kilesa*, **secondly**, *Vikhambhananibbāna* is the level which may be achieved during meditation. The arising of *kilesa* in the mind has been prevented by the concentration of the meditator, and **thirdly**, *parinibbāna* is the highest level. The arising of *kilesa* has been ended. The practitioner is called an *arahant*. Explaining *nibbāna*, Buddhādāsa said:

Nibbāna translates as ‘extinction without remainder’ but one may well ask extinction without remainder of what? It is simply the extinction without remainder of ‘I – mine’, which is simply the feeling of attached clinging... That is, the state in which there is nothing to be taken or to be.⁹⁶

For Buddhādāsa *nibbāna* is not just for the élite male society of the Sangha but is attainable, with the appropriate mindfulness, by everyone :

The blessed *nibbāna* is the destination for every person. There is an attraction towards *nibbāna*, or to put it another way, the inherent tendency of desire is always towards a naturally existing freedness. But this tendency suffers some kinds of interfering influences, such as the fruits of *kamma*, which retard it and pull it off its natural course.⁹⁷

Buddhādāsa did not claim that it was easy to reach *nibbāna*:

It occurs in the Pali scriptures themselves that the holy life, *brahmacariya*, is not something that the layperson can practice flawlessly well... because the state of being a layperson has many worldly concerns and obstacles.⁹⁸

But it was not impossible:

Don't take living in a house or a temple as the criterion of being a layperson or a monk. You must consider what is the person's state of mind.... These days those living in a temple may have a mind like one living at home... a householder may well have a mind like a monk or even an ascetic.⁹⁹

⁹⁵ See appendix two section 2.5 *nibbāna*.

⁹⁶ Buddhādāsa (n.d.-e), 79.

⁹⁷ Buddhādāsa (1999e), 25. This can be parallel to the Christian understanding: because man is created in the image of God, there is an inherent tendency of desire to return to God. For the Christian, the interfering influences such as ‘the fruits of *kamma*’ can be the ‘fallen nature of man’ or ‘sin and the fruit of sin’.

⁹⁸ Buddhādāsa (1928), 138.

⁹⁹ Buddhādāsa (1982c), 123.

Dhamma was essential for everyone:

The layperson's *dhamma* is necessary for the person who would attain *nibbāna* ... If one cannot be a good layperson then one cannot attain *nibbāna*.¹⁰⁰

He asserts that anyone, lay or ordained, who rids him/herself of *tuagoo-konggoo* could reach *nibbāna* – even fleetingly in the here-and-now:

This is *nibbāna* in which everyone should be interested. It is a natural matter, something that everyone can understand and do. It is of many kinds and levels of calm and we can attain it according to our own ability.¹⁰¹

Buddhādāsa regretted that many Buddhists wanted *nibbāna* even though they did not understand *nibbāna*:

I asked my audience which of two places they would choose: The first place was where whatever you wanted would be immediately granted to you. The second was where your heart would be empty and free from the influence of all feelings and finally would cease to be, leaving nothing to be this or that.

All of those who answered chose the first place. A few kept quiet fearing that it was one of my trick questions. When I further asked what, on reaching the first place, they would want, many answered they wanted the best things so as to make great merit. When questioned for what purpose they needed the merit, some said, 'to go to heaven', some said, 'for *nibbāna*'.

When one ponders their answers one realizes they do not even know heaven or *nibbāna* when they have already reached it. The first place is already heaven, whereas the second is *nibbāna*. Instead of choosing *nibbāna* they chose the stairs to enable them to reach *nibbāna*. They want *nibbāna* but they do not know anything at all or know very little about *nibbāna*. To them *nibbāna* is just something sacred that everybody says is the best.¹⁰²

For Buddhādāsa, *nibbāna* is not a city or 'the world of god' (โลกของพระเป็นเจ้า) where there is extreme eternal happiness that one can dream of. *Nibbāna* is neither a 'self' escaping from one world or realm to another, nor is it a state where there is a 'self'. *Nibbāna* is

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 41.

¹⁰¹ Buddhādāsa (n.d.-f), 14.

¹⁰² Buddhādāsa (1999e), 32-34.

about salvation and it can not be defined.¹⁰³ *Nibbāna* is deep with implications and applications for daily living for all human beings of whatever class, age or occupation.¹⁰⁴

Buddhadāsa thought that:

Each religious founder teaches the ‘ultimate escape’ or salvation. When one looks at the basic purpose of each religion one will find that the ultimate for all religions is salvation (*kwamraudphon* - ความรอดพ้น). They may appear different with different names but ultimately they refer to salvation from *dukkha*. In Buddhism this salvation is expressed by the words *vimutti* (วิมุตติ) which means escape, freedom, release, deliverance, liberation (from existence) ... or *nisorana* (นิสสรณะ) which means departure, or leaving.¹⁰⁵The Lord Buddha discovered the *Summum Bonum* which is the ultimate escape commonly known as *nibbāna*.¹⁰⁶

Buddhadāsa believed that the world is in chaos because of its misperception of what true salvation is. People do not understand *nibbāna*, hence they do not see and know the world as it really is. They hold onto self which is *dukkha*. Without *nibbāna* there is no permanent peace.¹⁰⁷

4.5 Buddhadāsa’s dialogue with Christianity

Buddhadāsa’s perception of Christianity and how it relates and compares to his *Theravāda* Buddhism shall be investigated. It is important to understand where Buddhadāsa is coming from and where Buddhadāsa perceived his Christian counterpart as coming from. Buddhadāsa’s understanding of Christianity can be learnt from his 1967 Sinclair Thompson Memorial Lectures given at the Thailand Theological Seminary.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ Buddhadāsa had a unique way of explaining and making sense of what *nibbāna* meant. His profound understanding of Buddhism and of modern westernized rational Thais coupled with his ingenuity, lead to an illuminating explanation of *nibbāna* using a new term that he coined, *duangfaicheevit* (*duangfai* - ดวงไฟ means light or fire; *cheevit* - ชีวิต means life) as key to his illustration and explanation of *nibbāna*. See Buddhadāsa (1999e).

¹⁰⁴ Buddhadāsa (1999e), 115.

¹⁰⁵ Buddhadāsa (1999e), 46.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 54.

¹⁰⁷ Buddhadāsa (1999e), 108-115.

¹⁰⁸ Now the faculty of theology, Payap University, Chiang Mai. One of the first private universities recognised by the Thai government.

The lectures, delivered in Thai, were published in English as ‘Christianity and Buddhism’ and later in Thai. This thesis uses the Thai transcription of the lectures. For accuracy, it is not quoting from the English language version.¹⁰⁹ Buddhadāsa also gave a lecture in 1971 entitled, ‘Teaching Buddhism through the Christian Bible’¹¹⁰ and in 1979 a series of lectures entitled, ‘The content of Christianity that Buddhists should know’, later published in Thai as ‘Buddhism-Christianity as perceived by Buddhadāsa’.

Understanding between religions, was close to Buddhadāsa’s heart.¹¹¹ In his quest to fathom Christianity’s key terms and concepts to find parallel ideas in Buddhism¹¹², Buddhadāsa equates the Christian God to *Dhamma*¹¹³, and the kingdom of God to *nibbāna*. By looking at God and *Dhamma*, we also note his thoughts on the Trinity. In the discussion of the kingdom of God and *nibbāna*, Buddhadāsa found common ground in the central importance of denial of self. Buddhadāsa’s view of redemption and reactions to his interpretation of Christianity will also be examined.

4.5.1 Dhamma is God

Phrachao (พระเจ้า god) is an authentic Thai word which refers to something that requires supplication, and propitiation according to the instinct of sentient creatures. Thai people

¹⁰⁹ Since it is neither a summary nor a direct translation of Buddhadāsa’s words.

¹¹⁰ Lecture given at Suanmook to teams of monks preparing to go abroad.

¹¹¹ See 4.1 for his life goals and his expressed principles for inter-religious dialogue.

¹¹² Buddhadāsa finds little difficulty in picking up Buddhist concepts in Christianity. For example: ‘**non-selfhood**’ or ‘**detachment**’ from Matthew 6:33 (strive first for the kingdom of God), 1 Corinthians 7: 29-31 (married men should live as though they were not married), and Matthew 18:3-6 & 19:14 (The kingdom of heaven & children); *Kamma* or ‘**actions**’ from Matthew 6:14-15, 33; 7:2, 7, 12, 18-20; 11:29; 12:33, 50; 18:35; 19:17.; ‘**self help**’ from Matthew 6:15; *Machimapadhipatha* (มัชฌิมาปฏิปทา - The middle way) from Matthew 11:29-30, etc. Buddhadāsa (1999c), 55-56, 172, 173-174, 54-62, 69.

¹¹³ See Schmidt-Leukel, Köberlin & Götz (2001), 84-97 from Santikaro Bhikkhu’s perspective.

recognized a spirit world¹¹⁴ with a kind of god in the sense of ghosts (*phi* ผี¹¹⁵) or angelic beings (*thewada* เทวดา) which, Buddhadāsa claimed, is common among nomadic people. When they arrived in today's Thailand they assimilated the Indian culture and accepted the Indian Gods such as *Shiva* and *Narai*. When the Brahmins in a later period taught that the king was a god incarnate (*awatan* อาวตาร), temples and shrines were built as monuments dedicated to the kings. So the word 'god' came to refer to the king (*Phrachaopandin* พระเจ้าแผ่นดิน - 'The god of the land'). This led to one Thai pronoun for 'I' being *kaaphrachao* (slave of god). When Buddhism was later accepted, the god-like idea of a king was further developed and people were taught that the king is one of the Buddhas incarnate and the pronoun developed into *kaaphrabuddhachao* (Slave of the Lord Buddha). All this is evidence that for Thai people god can refer to: a human being, higher beings (*thewada*), or some sort of power which cannot be understood. Buddhadāsa concluded that depending on culture, education, or the purpose of the use of the word god, all meanings are ultimately 'to be feared' or 'to be besought'. So a child has his/her kind of god which is different from an adult's, or a non-superstitious person's idea is different from a superstitious person's idea. One's god depends on how one has been taught and what one is happy to accept. God is not something new for Thai people.¹¹⁶

Even though new kinds of god have been introduced, they have not commanded the interest of Thai people. Buddhadāsa observed that when 'God' or 'Jehovah' or 'Jesus Christ the Lord' was introduced to Thai people, this 'god' had to be associated with some immediate tangible benefit like education, medical aid, or assistance with work.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ This is fully developed as the classical Buddhist worldview in *Traibhumikatha* with multi-tiered realms of heavens and hells. See chapter one.

¹¹⁵ Spirit of a dead person.

¹¹⁶ Buddhadāsa (1999c), 80- 81.

¹¹⁷ Buddhadāsa (1999c), 82.

Because of the association between Christianity and material benefit, a number of people were interested and willing to accept this new religion. By accepting it, they not only gained benefits but were also seen as modern and progressive as westerners. Thus 'god' for them remains the same in essence but has been renamed. They only know 'god' in terms of *phasakhon* and do not yet know the real meaning of 'god' which is not a person, not 'jit', not 'vinyan', but is *dhamma* or the power of *dhamma* which exists by nature and which can be defined as god in *phasatham*:

God in general understanding is god in terms of *phasakhon* which has not been developed to a higher understanding of god as in *phasatham*. For all religions, whatever is called god exists at two levels or two meanings. For ease and practicality in the discussion, god in terms of *phasakhon* is god that is described as having shape or form, able to love, to be angered, who requires this and that, can do right and wrong etc. whereas god in *phasatham* has no shape or form, remains constant and unchangeable, therefore does not love, is not angry, is beyond having any needs, beyond doing right and wrong. If god in terms of *phasakhon* is not interpreted to god in *phasatham*, that kind of god will continue as a god for a child or for a beginner. The person will never reach the real true god of the highest intellect, never reach the ultimate goal of the religion. Thus the importance of perseverance to study to reach the real true god in *phasatham*.¹¹⁸

As the above quotation shows, an anthropomorphic God, is unacceptable to Buddhadāsa.¹¹⁹ The transcendent, impassible, immutable God is the only one for him. To be personal brings god below the plane of perfection. Though God and *Dhamma* are two different terms, Buddhadāsa sought to get behind the terms to find parallel ideas in them. Buddhadāsa discovered that both the Christian God and the Buddhist *dhamma* performed the same functions. Using *phasatham* he could cope with all Christian teaching regarding God, except that God could not be personal:

¹¹⁸ Buddhadāsa (1999c), 84-85.

¹¹⁹ See De Silva (1971b), 47-58. De Silva's remark is significant in regard to mutual inter-religious understanding. 'The concept of a personal God is one that Buddhists find very difficult to understand. This difficulty is mainly due to the anthropomorphic image the word 'personal' gives rise to. It is necessary to bear in mind, as Paul Tillich puts it, that: 'Personal God does not mean that God is a person. It means that God is the ground of everything that is personal and that He carries within Himself the ontological power of personality. He is not a person, but he is not less than personal'. See also Conze (1974), 38 – 43.

If we now substitute the word *dhamma* for God, then there can be no misunderstanding, for God is truth, truth is God, and always so, because it means an impersonal God, which is *dhamma*.¹²⁰

Buddhadāsa perceived God in *phasatham* to exist in Buddhism as *dhamma* :

God the creator of the world is *avijjā*. It is one of the powers in nature that exists as the source and cause for the birth of all things and which results in the birth of suffering in the world. God, who realises that the creation of the world is a mistake¹²¹, is referred to as *vijjā*. It is the knowledge in nature that is the opposite of *avijjā* – that creation in its essence is creation of suffering. God, who controls the world, to punish or to reward beings, is referred to as the law of *kamma*. It is the power in nature that exists with the ultimate power and authority for this purpose. God the destroyer of the world is referred to as *vijjā* to be the cause for all suffering to ultimately cease to be. God who exists everywhere so that no action can be overlooked is referred to as the law of *kamma*. *Avijjā*, *vijjā*, *kamma* can be comprehended by the one word ‘*dhamma*’. Moreover, kindness, goodness, truth and justice which exist as part of or as god, all are included in *dhamma*.¹²²

Buddhadāsa explained that *dhamma* consists of four parts:

- 1) Nature itself – *sapawadhamma* (สภาวะธรรม)
- 2) The law of nature – *sajjadhamma* (สัจธรรม)
- 3) The duty of humans to act in accordance with the law of nature – *padhipaddhidhamma* (ปฏิบัติธรรม) or *niyanikkadhamma* (นียานิกธรรม)
- 4) The results, or fruits which will come to humans in accordance with the law of nature – *wibakdhamma* (วิบากธรรม) or *padhiwhetdhamma* (ปฏิเวธธรรม)

All four together are called *dhamma* which is to be highly respected as god.¹²³

Buddhadāsa further explained why what God created is called, ‘God’:

It is because God’s creation exists or is part of what we call ‘God’. If nature, earth, water, wind and fire, is not included in what we call ‘god’, then what has god got to use to create what we call the universe or all things? If there is anything that is not included in what we call ‘god’, then that god cannot be perfect. So the perfect god that encompasses all things is what Buddhists call *dhamma* as *sapawadhamma*.

The law of nature is easily seen as god. If god does not have or is not this power, then how will god create or control all things. Because of this power of creation and control, god is to be revered. Buddhists call this *dhamma* as *sajjadhamma*, or the law of nature.

¹²⁰ Buddhadāsa (1969), 17.

¹²¹ Buddhadāsa quoted Genesis 6: 6-7, ‘The Lord was grieved ... for I am grieved that I have made them.’

¹²² Buddhadāsa (1999c), 87- 88.

¹²³ Buddhadāsa (1999c), 89.

The duty of humans according to the law of Nature is in fact ‘godly duty’. Duties according to the law of nature are a direct result of the law of nature. If god is not or does not have god’s duty, then what does god have to help humans, or to love or punish them? What example can humans copy or follow as the example of their duties? So, the duty of humans according to the law of nature, is god or part of god that has been given to humans to follow as their duty according to the law of Nature. Those who accept god in this way are in fact doing the will of god more than anything else. For Buddhists this meaning of god is *dhamma* - *padhipaddhidhamma* or *niyanikka dhamma*.

Consequences to humans in accordance to the law of nature, or ‘Consummation’, is also part of god. If it is not, then what has god to use to reward humans who act according to god’s will? If we say it is nothing but nature and not god, then god will immediately be imperfect. For Buddhists, consequences to humans in accordance to the law of nature is known as *wibakdhamma* or *padhiwhetdhamma* or *lokuttradhamma* (โลกุตตรธรรม).

All four are *dhamma* so completeness is achieved. It is equivalent to what other people call god.¹²⁴

Buddhadāsa categorized *dhamma* as *asannkhatadhamma* (อสังขตธรรม) and *sannkhata-dhamma* (สังขตธรรม). Buddhadāsa described *asannkhatadhamma* as:

Asannkhatadhamma is beyond explanation, beyond being understood in normal language. The characteristics of *asannkhata-dhamma* are: no birth, no existence, no cessation, can not be categorised as good or evil; it can be affected by nothing. It has no shape or form because it does not require space, it is not time related, does not give anything to anybody nor receives anything from anybody. It is permanent, consistent, continual in its altogether wholeness and perfect in every way so as to be considered to exist everywhere.¹²⁵

Whereas *sannkhatadhamma* is the opposite of *asannkhatadhamma*:

It is matter, body, *jī* or *vinyan*, actions and results of actions that exist and cease to be. *Sannkhatadhamma* is known as the world’s phenomena. They are all *maya* that arise from *avijja* which in itself creates itself unendingly. They are categorised as good or evil, happiness or suffering, male or female and in numerous other pairs. In essence all are nothing but appearances.¹²⁶

Buddhadāsa would have sympathy with Christian theologians who deplore the Christian folk religion regarding God as a ‘Father Christmas figure’, or a ‘capricious parent’, or

¹²⁴ Buddhadāsa (1999c), 95-97.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 99-100.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 100.

‘the God of the prosperity gospel’. This he would consider the *phasakhon* God, the lowest level of understanding God. Buddhādāsa’s concept of God does not go beyond the awesome, creating and destroying, just, transcendent, but impersonal God:

As long as ‘god’ remains god as a person in *phasakhon*, one can say that human beings have not yet reached the real true god. Consequently, there will be conflicts, forcing one idea of god as superior to another, and ultimately being rejected by the intelligent and educated. Soon god will not exist in the hearts of modern educated people. Because this kind of god is not the real god.

The study about god has to develop from the lowest to the highest form. Ultimately god will be known as *dhamma*, not a person, not *jit* or *vinyan*, but something special that needs not have a body or soul, no form, not under the power of time and space, can not be explained in human words or by human methods, but requires the use of *phasatham* and *dhamma* methods. Only then can god be acceptable to modern educated people. We will not have to force ideas down each other’s throats. The god of *phasakhon* is for those who are unable to understand god in *phasatham*. God in *phasakhon* is like one speck of dust compared to the entire universe when compared to god in *phasatham*.¹²⁷

God in *phasatham* is not a personal god, but the truth, or the *dhamma*:

If god is a person, or even *jit* or *vinyan*, then god will be countable in one particular dimension, under one kind of method, or according to a particular science or knowledge. Because of this, Buddhists do not consider god as *jit* or *vinyan*, but as *asannkhatadhamma*.¹²⁸

Nature itself, the law of nature, the duty, and the consequences, all have *asannkhatadhamma* in them. It is perfectly concealed and can not be anything but itself. It exists as the only true reality of each entity. This is *dhamma* or god in *phasatham*.¹²⁹

We even define god further as the world’s saviour who will save the world from an undesirable state. We have *dhamma* as the world saviour... All in all, it is god who saves this world; but by god we must mean an impersonal god.¹³⁰

All things, including evil (the so-called devil or Satan) come from *dhamma* or from god since *dhamma* embraces everything:

¹²⁷ Buddhādāsa (1999c), 82- 84, 99.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 99.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 102.

¹³⁰ Buddhādāsa (1969), 15-16.

Dhamma is everything and the perfect god is also everything because it is one and the same. Even *Mara* or Satan is also included in *dhamma* or *god*. Because if god did not create Satan, then what could? *Mara* or Satan is nothing else but god's examination for humans. There is nothing that has not been born out of *dhamma*, or from god.¹³¹

To equate *dhamma* with the Christian God Buddhadāsa has denied personality in God. The situation for Christian apologists in the world of Theravada Buddhism is not dissimilar to that in which the early church apologists found themselves. They employed the term 'logos' to succeed in their mission. A different term will be needed as Buddhadāsa equates 'logos' ('the word' in John 1:1-2) with 'the law of nature':

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.' The Word here is actually the law of Nature. So to say that it is 'with god' or it 'was itself god' are both correct. Thus if the Word can be god, then why cannot *dhamma* be god as well? In fact it is one and the same. Because it exists in the beginning before anything else. Similar sayings are also found in Buddhism, '*Dhamma* exists before all else'¹³². 'God' signifies power and 'The Word' signifies the law whereas '*dhamma*' signifies both power and law and can also signify all other things. *Dhamma* is a marvellous word that cannot be translated into any other languages.¹³³

Buddhadāsa also equates 'the law of *kamma*' with God:

Dhamma, represented as the 'law of *kamma*' is equivalent to God because of its qualities of omnipotence and omnipresence.¹³⁴

In *phasatham*, ... God and the 'law of *kamma*' are one and the same thing. ...As the 'law of *kamma*' is absolute and unbiased we can name it God as well. ... Buddhists can therefore heartily and promptly accept that God is equal to *kamma*. God is *kamma*.¹³⁵

Buddhism teaches that one must help oneself. One reaps the fruit of one's own deeds, which is the 'law of *kamma*' and nothing to do with gods. The 'law of *kamma*' is god in the Christian sense but not one with a personality, living in heaven and controlling what happens in the human world. *Kamma* is not one who helps us. We have a choice to do

¹³¹ Buddhadāsa (1999c), 94-95.

¹³² *Dhammo hawaepathurahoasibupphae* from *Kalinggawannana Jatakattakatha* section 4 page 261.

¹³³ Buddhadāsa (1999c), 91-92.

¹³⁴ Buddhadāsa (1969), 14.

¹³⁵ Buddhadāsa (1999c), 41-43.

good or bad. If we do bad whether through choice or mistaking bad for good, we still receive bad fruit as a result of our bad deeds. The law of *kamma* never wavers. It is supreme, powerful and justifiably called 'god'. *Kamma* is like God that helps the humans to receive the fruits of their deeds.¹³⁶

Buddhadāsa appeared to understand that for Christians, even if one does good, one cannot be saved unless one believes in God. One's deeds will only count if they are according to God's will. Humans cannot save themselves but can be saved only by believing in God as their Saviour.¹³⁷ Consequently Buddhadāsa commented:

Buddhism allows one to use one's free thinking. One's reason indicates that God is *kamma*. However, Christians dare not, or perhaps are not free to use their own logic and thus cannot accept that their 'God' in the Buddhist sense can be *kamma*. If this is the case then the two religions are going opposite ways: Buddhism has a principle of self help, whereas Christianity has help from others. It would be the world's greatest joke if the truth was that whatever it is that is behind what makes human beings receive the fruit of their deeds is in fact the same.¹³⁸

Buddhadāsa concluded that whereas Christians contend that everything depends on the will of God, for the Buddhists it is the 'law of *kamma*'. Buddhadāsa observed that in the Bible there are several descriptions of God but there is no formal interpretation of god in *phasatham*. Therefore, he felt, it was unavoidable that there would be different opinions¹³⁹:

Dhamma, generally known as 'the teachings of the Lord Buddha', refers to all of Buddha's teachings. One can study the teachings and practise them to reach the real *dhamma*. *Dhamma* here has the same meaning as god in the *phasatham* as already explained. Apart from the above meanings, there are still a few other meanings of *dhamma*. Similarly, God in the Christian religion has many meanings; it can mean the Son or the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless once we encounter its real core meaning, they are one and the same.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ Buddhadāsa (1999c), 41-42.

¹³⁷ Buddhadāsa (1999c), 43.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 43-44.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 107.

¹⁴⁰ Buddhadāsa (1999c), 102-103.

4.5.1.1 God the Father

Buddhadāsa understood ‘God the Father’ as the god that creates, controls and ultimately destroys the world. Buddhadāsa perceived the creation in Genesis as ‘spiritual creation’ – not the physical world but the world in human hearts ¹⁴¹ :

God the creator in Genesis chapters 1-3, is in fact an exposition of the creation of the world in *phasatham*. ... The creation story in Genesis is describing the spiritual world, the world in the hearts of humans that have evolved from animals, distinguishable as human beings. The word *manut* (มนุษย์) ¹⁴² means ‘descendants of *Phramanupenchao* (เชื้อสายแห่งพระมนุษย์เป็นเจ้า)’ or ‘animals with moral consciousness’. Buddha’s teaching clearly demonstrates that this world in *phasatham*, is the world in the heart of humans, not the physical world which is of *phasakhon* and exists outside the human.... If god created a physical world or the world of the flesh, then that god has lowered itself down and become meaningless. ¹⁴³ A god creating and being involved with animals and physical things will have to deal with feelings, the spirit or intentions, the law of *kamma*, and the law of continuous change that exists in all things. But god, to be able to really create and control all things, is a kind of mysterious power beyond description in human language. ... In Genesis 2:7, When God breathes the breath of life down human nostrils, then it is a new creation in terms of spiritual creation and thus the breath of life distinguishes humans from animals. ¹⁴⁴

Buddhadāsa interpreted the story in Genesis 3:21-24 as God being unsuccessful in forbidding humans from eating the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but god was successful in preventing humans from eating the fruit from the tree of life. As a consequence human beings are in this predicament of *samsāra* which is suffering:

Prior to eating the fruit from god’s tree of the knowledge of good and evil, humans were not fully human enough to know what was good or bad, naked or clothed. When humans know right from wrong, and become humans to the full, humans face problems, emotional ones relating to good and evil, and thus emerged a new kind of suffering which exists only among humans, not animals. This is in fact the penalty of death that humans incurred from God for eating the fruit from the forbidden tree.

¹⁴¹ It is not in the scope of this thesis to discuss the appropriateness of Buddhadāsa’s uses of the Genesis texts. Buddhadāsa most probably had not realized the complexity of Genesis which elicits different views even among Christian theologians. How Buddhadāsa perceived Genesis with his Buddhist perspective will simply be stated. It would only be natural for others of his background to perceive things in a similar way.

¹⁴² Thai word for ‘human’.

¹⁴³ Compare Philippians 2: 5-7, ‘..., but made himself nothing. ...’.

¹⁴⁴ Buddhadāsa (1999c), 109-112, 117.

Humans now have to solve the specific human problems related to birth, aging, illness and death (*saṃsāra*) as a result of not having eaten the fruit from the other tree, the tree of life - the fruit of eternity. Having once eaten it one will never die but will become immortal like god.¹⁴⁵

Buddhadāsa linked eating the fruit of the tree of life to *nibbāna*:

So eating the fruit and not dying in Buddhism means to have the knowledge of *amatadhamma* (อมตธรรม) which means one no longer has a self to die, to be born, to age, and to be ill. This in effect is to achieve enlightenment, becoming Buddha, entering *amatamahanakorn* (อมตมหานคร), *nibbāna* in the here-and-now that one feels in one's heart. So the Bible talks about what the Buddhist calls *lokuttaradhamma* or *amatadhamma*. If the Bible is accurately translated Buddhists will be able to revere it as they do their own *Tipitaka*. ... Genesis 1:26 clearly stated that god created humans in his image, according to his likeness. Likeness here is not physical likeness but of the same ability to be like god. Humans may be in unity with god - if humans can eventually eat of the fruit of the tree of life - but god has delayed the time as stated in Genesis 3:24.¹⁴⁶

Buddhadāsa further explained the reason why God forbade humans to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It is not that God wanted humans to be ignorant but God did not want humans to be involved with the root of suffering which is equivalent to spiritual death. Suffering has entered human hearts because humans hold on to good and evil according to their own limited knowledge. They are incapacitated by their fear of evil and anxiety about good. Holding on to 'good and evil' is the root cause of *taṇhā*, of wants leading to greed, anger and delusion ending in suffering. When one can stop 'good and evil', revoke 'merit and demerit', and be above 'good and bad *kamma*' entirely, then one will become an *arahant* or reach *nibbāna*. To understand all of Jesus Christ's teachings that lead to 'life eternal' (ชีวิตนิรันดร์) is to eat the fruit from the tree of life. Thus, Jesus Christ has given the opportunity for Adam's descendants to eat the fruit from the tree of life.¹⁴⁷ In relation to Genesis 6: 6-7, Buddhadāsa perceived that 'God grieved that

¹⁴⁵ Buddhadāsa (1999c), 113.

¹⁴⁶ Buddhadāsa (1999c), 114 -116.

¹⁴⁷ Buddhadāsa (1999c), 121- 123.

he had created' as the *vijjā* element in God and creation as the *avijjā* element. Both exist in God as God encompasses all things. *Vijjā* makes one realize that if one stops creating, because of one's *taṇhā* and *kilesa* resulting in suffering which is *avijjā*, then one will reach the stillness, calmness, which is ultimately *nibbāna*.¹⁴⁸

God the Father in *phasatham* is not a personal God, but the truth, or the *dhamma*:

How can something that has no feelings, is not a person, be god? If you really think about it, this kind of thing should be called god more than the god of feelings. Feelings, as in a person, enable god to love, to be wrathful and so on. This kind of god of feelings will eventually be under the influence of humans. God will then have shape and form, be under the influence of time and space, eventually becoming god in *phasakhon*, a lower version of god.¹⁴⁹

4.5.1.2 God the Son

Buddhadāsa perceived Jesus Christ as 'God the Son' who teaches on behalf of 'God the Father' and who redeemed humans. Jesus Christ in the *phasakhon* is Jesus Christ the 'son of David', a prophet, and in the *phasatham*, 'God the Son' or 'God'.¹⁵⁰ Buddhadāsa pointed out that Jesus never spoke of his own heritage, but spoke of his parents and siblings as 'those who do the will of God' (Matthew 12:49, Mark 3:34). Jesus called himself a prophet who is without honour in his own home (Matthew 13:57).¹⁵¹ All miracles, including the ultimate one in which Jesus himself came back to life after three days, have to be understood in *phasatham*. In this case 'three days' signifies a time period when Jesus' teaching will flourish all over the world which is as if Jesus came back to life. This concept of a prophet coming back to life has its origins from the time even before the Buddha. The real miracles: the blind seeing, the deaf hearing, the dumb

¹⁴⁸ Buddhadāsa (1999c), 124 -126.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 91.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 129.

¹⁵¹ Buddhadāsa (1999c), 130 – 134.

speaking, the lame walking, or the dead coming back to life are not physical ones but spiritual ones. The physical miracles were also performed by the ‘*mayawee*’ (มายาวี - magicians) of the Buddha’s time, or the ‘masters of the spirits’.¹⁵² The spiritual miracles, in fact, are the miracles of miracles, bringing people out of the *avijjā* to *vijjā*:

Even if we can bring the dead back to life but if he/she is still ignorant, still suffering, then of what benefit can that be? But for the blind because of *avijjā* to see *vijjā* and escape *avijjā*. The deaf can hear *vijjā* and attain *nibbāna* and the lame walk away from suffering. These are the ultimate of all miracles.¹⁵³

Buddhadāsa compared Jesus Christ the ‘Son of God’ with Buddhists’ perception of the Lord Buddha. In the *phasakhon*, there are stories indicating that the Lord Buddha is a son of god: a white elephant came down from heaven, circled round the Buddha’s mother three times then entered her womb, at the time when she was in seclusion and had no relations with men. The idea that important prophets must be sons of gods and not of humans existed in India long before the birth of Christ. For those who do not believe in Christianity, Matthew 1: 18-20 is an insult to Christ as he is a child with no father. But in its *phasatham*, both Jesus Christ and the Lord Buddha spoke as god or *dhamma* intended them to speak and both led people to god or *dhamma*; thus they can be called ‘Sons of God’. He explained that in *Mahāyāna* Buddhism¹⁵⁴ there is *Athibuddha* (อธิพุทธ) who is eternal, ‘like god’, and temporarily took on human form as ‘Gotama Buddha’ or ‘Jesus Christ’ for example.¹⁵⁵ Buddhadāsa interprets Jesus Christ as God in similar fashion to his understanding of the Buddha and his *dhamma*:

As the Buddha said, ‘He who sees *dhamma* sees me. Those who do not see *dhamma* do not see me even though they are holding on to a corner of my robe.’¹⁵⁶ This means seeing the Buddha as he intended us to see him, is to

¹⁵² Indeed Jesus was accused for being one (Matthew 12:24).

¹⁵³ Buddhadāsa (1999c), 138-143.

¹⁵⁴ Some scholars criticise Buddhadāsa as being too influenced by *Mahāyāna* Buddhism possibly partly due to his Chinese family background.

¹⁵⁵ Buddhadāsa (1999c), 145-148.

¹⁵⁶ Buddhadāsa (1999c), 149 quoting from *Itivuttaka, Khuddaka Nikāya* 24/300.

accurately see the real *dhamma* that exists in all things including oneself. To see him otherwise is not seeing him. Seeing the physical Buddha is seeing Buddha in *phasakhon*. Seeing *dhamma* is seeing Buddha in *phasatham* - the true Buddha. It is impossible for the Buddha in *phasakhon* to be present everywhere and through eternity, but Buddha in *phasatham* can be. Therefore Buddha is *dhamma* and *dhamma* is God. Likewise Jesus is God, if one sees through the outer coverings.¹⁵⁷

4.5.1.3 God the Holy Spirit

Thai Protestants use ‘*Phravinyanborisut*’¹⁵⁸ and Thai Catholics use ‘*Phrajit*’ for God the Holy Spirit. Both terms are major stumbling blocks for Buddhists, making God the Holy Spirit beyond comprehension:

God cannot be a person or have a personality or individuality because god is not a person or thing that has a character in such a way as to be defined. ...For an entity that is *apawa* (without substance), the word *dhamma* or ‘nature’ is used. It definitely cannot be called *vinyan* or *jit*. *Vinyan* makes God the Holy Spirit beyond understanding. Buddhists can only understand *vinyan* as god in *phasakhon*, as *puggaladhitthana*, but not the true meaning of god. God will always have to be interpreted in *phasatham*.¹⁵⁹

Vinyan signifies something transient, impermanent, changeable and dependent on outside causes that can impact it. *Vinyan* is one of the five components of a person, *benjakhanda*. Genesis describes God who created the world in terms of a person with thoughts and feelings like a human being, further complicating the understanding of God.¹⁶⁰ Buddhādāsa calls for a more comprehensible Thai term for God the Holy Spirit:

I understand that ‘the word’¹⁶¹ is what can be called ‘spirit’. Spirit is translated into Thai as *vinyan* or *jit* which is very misleading, resulting in the misunderstanding of ‘God the Spirit’ as it implies consciousness or soul.

It will be good to come up with a more accurate term for *Phravinyan* or *Phrajit* so Thai people may correctly understand ‘God the Spirit’. The

¹⁵⁷ Buddhādāsa (1999c), 149.

¹⁵⁸ *Phra* (พระ) – monk, generally used in front of revered persons/beings; *vinyan* (วิญญาน) – spirit; and *borisut* (บริสุทธิ์) – pure.

¹⁵⁹ Buddhādāsa (1999c), 108 -109.

¹⁶⁰ Buddhādāsa (1999c), 107 -108.

¹⁶¹ In John 1:1-5.

words, 'Holy Ghost' shock Thais. ... 'God the Spirit' should be what we call in Buddhism, *niyyānika-dhamma* (นิยยานิกรธรรม) the highest gift for earthlings - like a spiritual gem, the kind that brings extreme joy.¹⁶²

Buddhadāsa parallels the Christian Trinity to the Buddhist triple gems (calling it the Buddhist Trinity):

'God the Father' is like the owner of the gem mine, 'God the Son' takes the gems and distributes them, 'God the Spirit' is the gems. The three work together as a whole, cannot be separated. They are one. Likewise, for the Buddhist Trinity, The Buddha is the one who discovered the gem mine, the *dhamma* is the gems and the *sangha* takes the gems and distributes them.¹⁶³

4.5.2 *Nibbāna* and the Kingdom of God

Buddhadāsa equates *nibbāna* to 'the kingdom of God':

The kingdom of God, in *phasakhon*, is the world we can only enter when we die. The world that is more beautiful and enjoyable. One can indulge oneself to the full, completely satisfy one's desires. In fact, in the *phasatham*, the kingdom of god is in the now but we cannot see it. It is a realm of peace, calmness, tranquillity beyond the delusions of feelings and desires. This in fact is more pleasing. It is called *nibbāna* which one can have in the here-and-now. This in fact is 'the kingdom of god' that one should enter before one dies.

To untangle oneself from the *māyā* (delusion) that is temporary, is to enable one to be with god or to be in god's kingdom without any more suffering. This in its essence, means there is no longer any 'self' for suffering because one is no longer holding on to anything of self. In *phasakhon*, we say we have entered the kingdom of God.¹⁶⁴

Buddhadāsa called the kind of living found in 1 Corinthians 7: 29-31 as living with *jitwang*, that is, a mind free from the delusion of self:

To live with *jitwang* is necessary in everyday life. Whatever impacts one, whether it is through the mind, eye, ear, nose, tongue or touch, one needs to be in control, not allowing the idea of a self, which leads to selfishness, to emerge. One needs to be fully alert, be mindful, be full of *paññā*. The minute one can do this, it can be said that, that minute one has entered the

¹⁶² Buddhadāsa (1999c), 150 -153,156. This is further discussed in 8.2.1 God the Holy Spirit.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 153 -154.

¹⁶⁴ Buddhadāsa (1999c), 171 -172.

kingdom of god. Because there is nothing but purity, cleanliness, light, clarity and the kind of peace and calmness that is incomparable. It is possible then to work for oneself and for others to the full.¹⁶⁵

Another example of living with *jitwang* that Buddhādāsa used was the fact that Christ praises ‘the child-like mind’ – the innocent found in Matthew 19:14, and Matthew 18:3-6. Buddhādāsa was of the opinion that children do not hold onto *tuagoo-konggoo* to the same extent as adults.¹⁶⁶

The core of Buddhism is the teaching of *anattā* and *suññatā*, leading to *nibbāna*:

In all discourses,... all of which may be summed up as ‘nothing should be grasped at’. ... When we have come to know this, we know all the utterances of the Buddha. And to have put this into practice is to have practiced *dhamma* completely in its every phrase and aspect.¹⁶⁷

Buddhādāsa perceives that the cross, the symbol of Christianity, can also be perceived as the heart of Buddhism. For Christians to get to God, they have to go via the cross.

Similarly for Buddhists to get to *nibbāna*, they also have to go via this cross symbol:

I tell my Christian friends that the cross they wear round their necks is actually the heart of Buddhism. The cross is a symbol of the elimination of *tuagoo-konggoo*. The vertical post is ‘I’, whereas the horizontal is to strike out the ‘I’. Thus the cross symbolizes the elimination of the ‘I/me and my/mine’, the heart of Buddhism.... Most Buddhists do not perceive the cross in the same way, instead they find the cross abominable. To them it is a symbol of the other religion, a symbol of torturing and killing. For Christians, the cross is a sacred symbol of Jesus who died to redeem human beings. He sacrificed his life so humans can know god - like a stair-case to get to God. To get to God one must go via this cross. I tell them to get to *nibbāna*, one also has to go via the cross. That is to eliminate the ‘I’. Once there is no more ‘I’, we then enter *nibbāna*.¹⁶⁸

Buddhādāsa developed unique Thai terms for the teaching of *anattā* and *suññatā*:

¹⁶⁵ Buddhādāsa (1999c), 173.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 173-174.

¹⁶⁷ Buddhādāsa (1988a), 61.

¹⁶⁸ Buddhādāsa (1984), 4-5.

jitwang, *wangjagtuagoo-konggoo* (ว่างจากตัวกู-ของกู - 'empty of I/me-my/mine') and *dubmaileua* (ดับไม่เหลือ - extinction without remains).¹⁶⁹ Buddhadāsa uses *dubmaileua*, *amatadhamma*, the deathless (ไม่ตาย) and 'everlasting life', 'life eternal' (ชีวิตนิรันดร์) for *nibbāna*:

Everlasting life is the true life. It never ends (dies). It exists through eternity. It implies the ultimate that is beyond our knowledge, god perhaps, but one simply accepts that it exists and exists through eternity, no beginning and no end. In Buddhism we have this idea of something which nothing can change. We use words to describe it as if it is a person or a thing. We say 'enter *nibbāna*' as if there is something entering *nibbāna* but we understand that it exists eternally, not returning to be born, not changing. This is 'everlasting life' in Buddhism.

Dhamma that never dies because nothing can affect it, no coming into existence, no existence, no extinction...It is eternal. Those who reach this level of *dhammā*, are in eternity. No more 'I' to die. Even if the body dies, there is no longer an 'I' to die. This can be called entering into the same state as *dhamma* which is eternity. The real *dhamma* is eternity.¹⁷⁰

Buddhadāsa asserted that we suffer because we know good - evil (ดี -ชั่ว), and merit - demerit (บุญ - บาป). Those without suffering are above good-evil and merit-demerit. Black *kamma* is demerit, white *kamma* is merit, black and white *kamma* is a mixture of merit and demerit. Finally, there is not black *kamma* and not white *kamma*. This last kind of *kamma* ends all - merit and demerit, good and evil and leads to *nibbāna*:

If we know good and evil for holding onto, we will suffer. We need to know good and evil not for holding onto but for realizing that they are not constant, but illusion which causes suffering. If one can then let go, one reaches *nibbāna*. ... If one lets go of oneself, then there is no more self. If there is no more self then there is no reference point for good or bad. Whether one gives self to god or is just empty of self, it is the way to 'everlasting life'.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ Buddhadāsa's understanding of *anattā* and *suññatā* sounds similar to that which Prof. Winston L. King called 'super-self' of non-self. To be an *arahant* or to be a person of *jitwang* or to be in the state of *nibbāna* is to be a perfect human being. (King (1961), 61) The perfection of *anattā* and *suññatā* is the supreme selfhood which is absolutely free from *dukkha* and *saṃsāra*. Could it possibly be along the line of the Pauline 'new being' or 'new creation' as suggested by Dr Swearer? (Swearer (1977), 67-84).

¹⁷⁰ Buddhadāsa (1984), 217-219.

¹⁷¹ Buddhadāsa (1984), 224 -228.

Buddhādāsa also equates *nibbāna* with the Christian *kwamrawd* (ความรอด- salvation) by describing *nibbāna* in terms of ‘release, freedom, liberation’. In the *Majjhima-Nikaya* the concept of *nibbāna* as extinction is not used as much as *vimutti*. Because *nibbāna* cannot be fully described, *vimutti* is used for the perfection of religious life thus interpreting *nibbāna* more positively¹⁷²:

When one has completely ceased to feel *attawaht* (egoism) there is no more self to die or to be born. What remains is pure nature which exists by itself for ever, no death no birth. In *phasakhon*, we have reached god or *amatadhamma*. The second, the hour, or the day, *avijjā* is destroyed¹⁷³ (The illusion of self which is the outer covering), the radiance of god or *baromdhamma* reaches the *jit*, we enter a ‘new kind of life’, are reborn,. ... If we can permanently maintain this new kind of life, then we have attained *vimutti*, emancipation, freedom, or salvation. We escape from the worldly existence, reach the goal of our religious endeavour.¹⁷⁴

Nibbāna is possible for everyone to experience here-and-now. Each person can attain *nibbāna* in this life regardless of previous *kamma*. One need not be a monk first because *arahant-ship* transcends both monk-hood and laity. One can *dubmaileua* within the split second of one’s last breath if one can realize that there is no *tuagoo-khonggoo*. The Buddha was a human and taught nothing beyond the ability of humans to achieve.¹⁷⁵ The teaching of *suññatā*, the emptiness of all things, is not to suggest that we leave the world but rather to assist us to live in it victoriously. That is, to make use of the world fully but not claim it as *tuagoo-konggoo*. By claiming it as *tuagoo-konggoo* one becomes its slave.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷² Ergardt (1977), 159-160.

¹⁷³ Reaching *vimutti* or ‘state of deathlessness’, without having to die first - while one is still alive, is similar to Christian salvation which occurs while one is still alive.

¹⁷⁴ Buddhādāsa (1999c), 36-37.

¹⁷⁵ What Buddhādāsa expounded bears comparison with what Jesus taught of ‘the kingdom of God’. The kingdom of God similarly can also be experienced here-and-now, and it is possible for everyone to enter it regardless of his or her previous *kamma*. Similarly, one can enter the kingdom of God within the split second of one’s last breath if one can accept Christ as Lord and Saviour. Christ is fully human and taught nothing beyond the ability of humans. But for Christians, it is a matter of grace not a matter of achieving but acceptance.

¹⁷⁶ This is like John 17:14-16, ‘To live in the world but not belong to it’.

Buddhadāsa found another striking similarity, the ultimate thing that religion has to offer whether ‘the kingdom of god’ or *nibbāna*, is given freely. ‘To gain *nibbāna* without payment’ (ลพฺพทานิพฺพุติญฺชฌมานา) parallels Matthew 10:8b, Revelation 21:6, 22:17b¹⁷⁷:

The ultimate from god is freely given. However the receiver needs to diligently work to receive¹⁷⁸ The consummation one can obtain in this life, not after one is dead. This we call entering ‘the kingdom of god’ or *nibbāna*. Whether one can enter in this life or after death let those with *paññā* consider and decide for themselves.¹⁷⁹

4.5.3 Redemption

The redemption effected by Jesus Christ is likened to, ‘Performing meritorious acts (บำเพ็ญบารมี)¹⁸⁰ to move (รื้อขน) creatures (สัตว์) from the heap of *dukkha*.’¹⁸¹ It can be perceived as redeeming (ไถ่) creatures from the bondage of *kilesa* and *taṇhā*. Buddhadāsa perceived two stages in redemption¹⁸²: the **first** stage is being redeemed by others. (e.g. the Buddha, or Jesus Christ.) The Buddha had to sacrifice himself to search for the truth. He was enlightened. Out of compassion, he sacrificed himself teaching others. All creatures have *avijjā* as their creditor, the *mara* lord holding on to them. They are in the mire of *kilesa* and *taṇhā*, in need of being redeemed from their bondage to *avijjā*. They need to be shown *vijjā* so they can be free from suffering; the **second** stage is redeeming oneself. The Buddha taught, ‘one can depend only on oneself’ (อตุตทาหิตุตตโนนาโถ - *Attāhiattānonatho*) and ‘You need to walk along the path yourself. All the *tathagata* (ตถาคต) can do is to point the way’:

¹⁷⁷ Buddhadāsa (1999c), 174.

¹⁷⁸ Matthew 11:12.

¹⁷⁹ Buddhadāsa (1999c), 175.

¹⁸⁰ *Pāramī* (บารมี) means perfection or stages of spiritual perfection achieved by a Bodhisatta on his path to Buddhahood.

¹⁸¹ Buddhadāsa (1999c), 158.

¹⁸² Buddhadāsa (1999c), 158-162.

There will be no journey without the Lord Buddha showing the way. Even if a few happened to stumble onto the correct path, they could not help others. Their knowledge is limited to themselves. It requires the wisdom of a Buddha to be able to point others to the right path and so for many to follow. Therefore the first redeemer is the Buddha and the actual redeemer is the person who makes the journey. Without one stepping out and walking, surely one can never get to the kingdom of god. If one can accept this principle then one can see that in principle, redemption exists in all religions. It is only the presentation that differs.¹⁸³

Buddhism places more importance on this second stage, redeeming oneself. It is not what has been sacrificed but what the redeemed has gained that is of importance. Therefore if the result of the redemption is for the redeemed to have the ultimate benefit, *nibbāna* or entering the kingdom of god, then that redemption is considered the greatest redemption. Whether or not the redeemer needed to sacrifice his/her life is not of importance. The greatest redemption does not necessarily require the redeemer to lose his/her life:

The greatest redemption of Jesus Christ is in the fact that he helped humans to enter the kingdom of God. If he was talking to the foolish, no matter how many times he had to sacrifice his life it would be of no meaning because no one would enter the kingdom of God. The real meaning of redemption is to cause one to be born again as Jesus said in John 3:3. Therefore redemption is to cause human beings to be spiritually born again in this life. All religions have this which is called redemption as the key function, otherwise religion will lose the essence of being religion.

I think the redemption of human beings is the duty of all religions. It is also the duty of all humans to redeem themselves. They can do it with their own instinct as all animals have an instinct for survival. However, survival in religious terms is of the highest level. Therefore religious redemption has its basis in the natural instinct for survival, which varies according to their different levels of development.¹⁸⁴

A redeemer sacrificing his life has a long-lasting impact, once and for all, because of his teaching which lasts through the centuries.¹⁸⁵ Buddhadāsa perceived that all need to cooperate with God to redeem themselves by being born again according to religious

¹⁸³ Buddhadāsa (1999c), 161.

¹⁸⁴ Buddhadāsa (1999c), 163-166.

¹⁸⁵ Buddhadāsa (1999c), 159.

instructions. One needs to study until one comes to an accurate understanding and follows the teachings with all of one's life, or, as some say, 'give one's life to God' and 'do the will of God'. In essence it is to love oneself, help oneself to overcome *kilesa*, to be free from all suffering. If one can do this, *bap* - original *bap*, new *bap*, or the latest *bap* will all be redeemed:

Redeeming seems different in different religions but at its core it is the same. The Bible talks about giving all of one's life to serve God, serving others is like serving God. In Buddhism we talk of making merit and doing good, to reduce *avijjā*, not to let the mind hold on to anything because of delusion. To do *kamma* that is neither good nor bad which finally is the end of good *kamma* and bad *kamma*. One religion is all to do with God and the other has no mention of God.

To serve God and do His will is like following *dhamma*. This in fact is to destroy one's selfishness. All *bap* centres in one's selfishness. Selfishness causes greed, anger and delusion which leads one to commit all kinds of evil in body, words, or mind. One can redeem oneself from these *bap* by doing the opposite, by doing what God wants one to do with all of one's effort.¹⁸⁶

Buddhadāsa perceived that there is one universal problem of humanity and one universal purpose of all religions – the common need for redemption. He starts with the first noble truth, all people are subject to suffering. He sees that this truth (for varying reasons) is accepted by all religions, and certainly by Christianity. For Buddhadāsa, the ultimate problem for all people may be expressed in *phasakhon* as suffering from evil power in its various forms. Since escape from suffering or 'releasing people from this evil power' is also the common goal of religions (only the means being different according to each religion), Buddhadāsa saw an essential soteriological unity in all religions:

Every human being, no matter to what country he belongs, or what language he speaks, or what religion he professes, has but one universal problem, namely, overcoming evil or mental impurity or defilements. That which is called evil or mental impurity is to be found in each individual. It does not belong to or is not the problem of one particular religion only; each individual professing any religion has the problem of overcoming the evil. As such the way to solve this problem must be one which can be used

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 157-168.

by every human being. The way or instrument to destroy evil is named 'religion', therefore true religion or religion in essence is universal in its application. The belief that there are literally many religions is something meaningful only in the eyes of those who see only the outer forms, or view religion only superficially. There are different outer forms or embodiments of religion, but every religion or what is embodied in different forms of religion is but one and the same thing. If one looks at religion with mundane eyes one will see many religions. If one sees with supramundane eyes one will see only one religion.¹⁸⁷

If one should go on to a deeper understanding of *dhamma* until finally one realizes the absolute truth, one would discover that there is no such thing called religion- there is no Buddhism, Christianity, or Islam... There is only reality or nature, call it whatever you like - *Dhamma* or Truth - but you cannot particularize that *Dhamma* or Truth as Buddhism, Christianity, or Islam, for whatever it is, you cannot define it by giving it labels. The reason the division of Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam exists is that the truth has not yet been realized. Only outer forms are being taken into account, (just as with canal water, muddy water, and the rest).¹⁸⁸

For Buddhadāsa, all human problems stem from the clinging to *tuagoo-konggoo* and the solution is detachment from *tuagoo-konggoo*:

The highest thing for human-beings is to be without suffering. All religions endeavour for all to receive the highest, which is to have no suffering. How can one receive this gift of being without suffering? Some say from believing in God, from giving all to God. But one can also say from knowing *dhamma*. Knowing all things as they really are, then one will know to let go. Our mind will also let go, resulting in no suffering. Though the path to end suffering may be different, but the core is the same that is to eliminate *tuagoo*. Some may give the 'I' to God and for some it may be the realization that in reality there is in fact no 'I'. Like taking medication, we all need not take the same medication to be healed from the same illness. As there are different medications to suit different people. ... If they really have God, they too will no longer have *tuagoo-konggoo* because all is given to God, all do according to God's instructions.¹⁸⁹

If one understands the heart of one's own religion, one will find that all religions are the same in that they want human-kind to be without selfishness, to the extent that there is no more selfishness for a self, no more *kilesa* according to one-self. People can only grasp this truth when they understand the heart of their religion.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ Buddhadāsa (1999c), introduction on pp. c-d of the English publication. The Thai publication has a different introduction.

¹⁸⁸ Buddhadāsa (1971), 88-89.

¹⁸⁹ Buddhadāsa (1984), 20 -22.

¹⁹⁰ Buddhadāsa (1984), 4.

His strong conviction that *Buddha-dhamma* is the answer to all human problems can be seen from his sermon, '*Dhamma- the World Saviour*',¹⁹¹

4.5.4 Buddhadāsa's critics

There are positive as well as negative reactions to Buddhadāsa's works. Prof. Dr Donald K. Swearer saw Buddhadāsa's works as potential for theological renewal and Christian-Buddhist dialogue in Thailand and his *phasakhon-phasatham* as tools for inter-religious understanding.¹⁹²

Among the Thai Buddhists with whom I have talked it is generally agreed that he is the most important as well as the most controversial spokesman for Buddhism in Thailand today. He is praised for his profundity in expounding the *dhamma* but at the same time is criticized because his erudition exceeds the understanding of the ordinary man. Others are unhappy with the originality of his thought asserting he does not expound the scriptures, especially the *Abhidhamma*... He stands alone as one of the most creative, profound and stimulating thinkers I have discovered in the Buddhist *Sangha*.¹⁹³

However, there were several scholars, who had a negative view of his work. Tambiah described the lectures as:

An unsuccessful attempt to translate Christian concepts and their arrangement into Buddhist terms.¹⁹⁴

The Sri Lankan scholar, Amarasiri Weerarama, states that:

No Christian worthy of his name will be prepared to make this jelly-like compromise. Similarly no sensible Buddhist will adopt the Bhikkhu's heresies regarding Buddhism, *Dhamma*, *Karma*, God, etc. ... By trying to interpret away Christianity to fit into the thought and concepts of Buddhism he does violence to both Buddhism and Christianity. ... He is advocating a new brand of religion which is neither Christian nor Buddhist. It cannot be accepted by either party.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹¹ Buddhadāsa (1969); Christians also claim that the Lord Jesus Christ is the World Saviour.

¹⁹² Swearer (1971), 3-30; Swearer (1977), 136-137.

¹⁹³ Swearer (1981), 6.

¹⁹⁴ Tambiah (1976), 425.

¹⁹⁵ Weerarama (1971), 31-37.

Lynn A. de Silva, a Sri Lankan who gave his Sinclair Thompson Memorial Lectures in 1964, wrote:

This book is an apology for Christianity and a subtle attempt to convert the Buddhists of Thailand... The Office of Christian Education in Bangkok, ... has chosen its propagandist and propaganda unwisely and erroneously, for the venerable Bhikkhu's words will be like seeds cast on stony ground.¹⁹⁶

Sulak Sivaraksa, maintains that Buddhādāsa is in effect providing a Buddhist legitimization for a foreign, non-Thai religious form:

He always looks at things from a good perspective. In particular, he sees other religions and other cultures through rose-coloured spectacles. ... There is no way that Christians can accept Buddhādāsa's rendering of the notion of 'God'. That Thai Christians do accept it is because it is beneficial for them to do so and because they are the minority in Thailand.¹⁹⁷

Dr H.G. Grether, despite having several concerns with Buddhādāsa's interpretations of Christianity, regarded them as challenges for both Buddhists and Christians to strive for mutual understanding of each other's faith.¹⁹⁸ Buddhādāsa realized the implications and the controversy which his work had ignited:

If striving for mutual understanding between religions will cause any *bap* whatsoever, I am willing to be a *khonbap* (คนบาป - demerit person) because of that. This is done in the hope that peace will prevail.¹⁹⁹

Buddhādāsa's work is by no means final, but an opening for great possibilities to come. It is no offence but rather to be commended that he attempted through his Buddhist and Asian viewpoint to understand Christianity. It is certainly far-fetched to brand him as a heretic within his own religion and a misinterpreter of Christianity. The partiality of Buddhādāsa's understanding of Christianity is obvious and understandable.

¹⁹⁶ De Silva (1971a), 1-3.

¹⁹⁷ Religious Committee for Development (1983), 57.

4.6 Summary

Buddhādāsa was and is an outstanding figure in *Theravāda* Buddhist and Thai society. The major transformation his teaching affected was to bring the *lokkuttara* back to what had become a *lokiya* way of Buddhism. Buddhādāsa achieved a this-worldly emphasis for Buddhism by the use of his profound insight in the understanding of language, of *phasakhon* and *phasatham*. His explication of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* gave a fresh perspective on the teaching of *kamma* and *nibbāna*: *nibbāna* is achievable for all in the here-and-now; as a consequence, *kamma*'s controlling effect is reduced to some extent. His teaching emphasizes *jītwang*, releasing one's hold on *tuagoo-konggoo* for the attainment of *nibbāna*.

In his dialogue with Christianity Buddhādāsa has done Christians a great service. His understandings or misunderstandings are revelatory. In effect he has held up a mirror for the Christian side to reflect upon. How he seems to understand God and the trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) reveals the gulf between the worldviews or rather the paradigm shift needed to bring each in turn into focus: the trinity and the triple gems, *nibbāna* and the kingdom of God. The crucial point is that Buddhādāsa's work challenges Thai Christians to re-think their theology and missionary outreach.²⁰⁰ It challenges Thai Buddhists to re-look at their understanding of Buddhism and of Christianity. It reveals the necessity of an in-depth understanding of one's own faith and of the other's to the point that similarities and dissimilarities are clearly perceived and messages can be sent across the religious cultural divide and worldviews.

¹⁹⁸ Grether (1969), 141-147.

¹⁹⁹ Buddhādāsa (1984), 5 publication's preface.

²⁰⁰ Key questions are: a) Can some Buddhist-like teachings found in Christianity be better used to explain and serve as links and bridges?, b) What can be found in Christianity that can really touch the hearts and minds of Thai Buddhists? c) What roles can Buddhistic-Christian views play and how can they be used in communicating?

Chapter five : The venerable Payutto, his explanation of Buddhism for Thai society and his perception of Christianity

Payutto offers another dimension to the understanding of the significance of Buddhist-Christian dialogue. Payutto's perception of his own religion and of Christianity will be examined.

5.1 Overview of Payutto

Payutto was born on January 12th 1938. He wrote *Phutthatham*, which is considered the greatest work on Theravada Buddhist doctrine written since Buddhaghosa wrote the *Visuddhimagga*.¹ *Phutthatham* is a commentary on the *Tipiṭaka*. The three basic Buddhist teachings of *silā*, *samādhi* and *paññā* are explained in a contemporary context with references to the original Pali texts. Payutto's various works apply Buddhist thought to modern society:

Because Buddhism has played such an outstanding role as the nation's spiritual source of culture and tradition, Buddhism is re-interpreted by Payutto Bhikkhu as Thai wisdom and his works are considered to be the result of an attempt to search for the foundation of the nation's development based on Thai norms.²

Payutto was advisor for Mahidol University in the development of the world's first complete computerized version of the *Tipiṭaka*.³ He is an international speaker, received ten Honorary Doctorate degrees from nine Thai Universities, and is presently the Lord

¹ Swearer & Promta (2000), 4, 21.

² Swearer & Promta (2000), 5-6.

³ Mahachulalongkornrajawittayalai (1999), 17; Thammasapha (1994), 21.

Abbot of Yanavesakavan temple (วัดญาณเวศกวัน) Nakornpathom province (จังหวัดนครปฐม).⁴ In 1994 he received the UNESCO Prize for Peace Education.⁵ As the King's protégé, he was progressively awarded honorary clerical titles⁶; from Phrasriwisutthimolee in 1969, Phrarajavaramuni in 1973, then Phradebvedi in 1987, Phradhammapitaka in 1993, and Phrapromkunaporn in 2006.

5.2 Payutto's interpretation of Buddhism

Like Buddhādāsa, Payutto wanted *lokuttaradhamma* to be part of everyday life. Payutto was not content with the way Thai Buddhism had been blighted, *lokuttaradhamma* being overshadowed by *lokiyadhamma*:

Not to be a slave of the world, not to be under the control of grasping or holding onto things, but to be able to make one's mind free, clear, clean and bright, peace and happiness from within, thus *lokuttaradhamma* is of great value to this life on earth; *lokuttaradhamma* is no longer an extravagance of life.⁷

Payutto's book, *Phutthatham*, complemented Buddhādāsa's work. Payutto expounded on Buddhādāsa's *tuagoo-khonggoo* teaching,⁸ and systematically linked Buddhist *dhamma* principles, bringing out the social dimension of Buddhism. His work on Buddhism and the individual, Buddhism and society will be examined.

⁴ Mahachulalongkornrajawittayalai (1999), 14-16; Thammasapha (1994), 21.

⁵ Mahachulalongkornrajawittayalai (1999), 15; Thammasapha (1994), 21.

⁶ Mahachulalongkornrajawittayalai (1999), 15; Thammasapha (1994), 21.

⁷ Payutto (2000a), 20.

⁸ Payutto (1995c), 143-145.

5.2.1 Buddhism and the Individual

Payutto believed that both laity and monks could practice *lokuttaradhamma*. As had Buddhādāsa, so Payutto taught that the lay person is not limited to *lokiyadhamma*. Payutto did not treat *nibbāna* as a mere academic topic but presented *nibbāna* as the highest objective that all human beings should aspire to:

All in the modern society should have at least the lowest level of *ariyapol* which is the *sodaban* as their goal in life. To be a *sodaban* is most suitable for people of the modern generation and a necessity for modern society.⁹

The majority Folk Buddhists perceive that *nibbāna* is an ideal that is only achievable for monks after several successive lives, so much so that they feel *nibbāna* is beyond their reach. Payutto perceived that one can enter *nibbāna* in this life. Moreover, it is not only monks, but all, male or female, who can enter *nibbāna* in this life. He linked *paramatthadhamma* to modern society for daily living, bringing *lokuttaradhamma* and *lokiyadhamma* together:

Lokuttaradhamma is for everybody. *Lokuttaradhamma* is a tool for those who are in the midst of *lokiyadhamma* to keep afloat and balanced. They will not get sunk in *lokiyadhamma*. *Lokuttaradhamma* helps humans to survive. It gives freedom to those who are in the *lok-dhamma* (worldliness - โลกธรรม) which is pressing them to become slaves.¹⁰

Payutto places equal importance on *lokuttaradhamma* and *lokiyadhamma*, *lok-dhamma* enslaving humans while *lokuttaradhamma* gives them freedom.¹¹ Buddhādāsa presented the heart of Buddhism and established *nibbāna* in its centrality and pointed practical ways to reach it. Payutto linked the surrounding *dhamma* teachings to the centre and demonstrated how they all harmonized. In *Phutthatham*, he systematically presented

⁹ Payutto (1995c), 426-427.

¹⁰ Payutto (1975), 16.

¹¹ This parallels to the Christian understanding of sin enslaving one.

Buddhist *dhamma* in its entirety,¹² starting from basic morality to the ultimate *paramatthadhamma* leading to *nibbāna*, demonstrating how each is linked to the other and showing how *dhamma* relates to the lay person's daily life:

Payutto's book 'Phutthatham' is important evidence showing Payutto's effort in systematically presenting Buddhist teachings in the greatest detail, more brilliantly than they have ever been expressed, not just in the history of Thai Buddhism, but also in the history of Theravada Buddhism.¹³

Another of his influential works is *Thammanooncheewit* (A Constitution for Living).¹⁴ He intended this book to be a handbook for the laity to lead their daily life by the *dhamma*. Payutto uses the word *vimutti* instead of *nibbāna* when he deals with *paramatthadhamma* whereas Buddhādāsa in all his work had directly used the terms *nibbāna* and *lokuttaradhamma*. Payutto said, 'All of the *dhamma* has *vimutti* as its essence as endorsed by the Buddha's teaching.'¹⁵ Payutto and Buddhādāsa emphasized different angles but they complemented each other. Both play a major role in leading Thai Buddhism into a new direction for Thai society.

Payutto neither used science to redefine Buddhism nor adjusted Buddhism to agree or coincide with science. He perceived that Buddhism and science have differences and similarities. Both Buddhism and science study nature to find the truth about nature. Nature has a set pattern, process and systems that can be called the law of nature. Scientists search in order to understand nature but Buddhism not only searches for the truth about nature but for the ultimate truth which is freedom, *nibbāna*. Buddhism seeks to use the truth or the reality found in order to solve problems, for humanity to escape suffering. Payutto viewed abstract elements, *nibbāna*, as part of nature and as real as the

¹² Like systematic Christian theology.

¹³ Visalo (1999), 17.

¹⁴ Payutto (2000a).

¹⁵ Payutto (1996a), 33.

material part of nature. Payutto pointed to the inadequacy of science in dealing with the abstract in its search for truth, resulting in the incompleteness of its comprehension of reality:

Buddhism should be the foundation for Science. Science should recognize that the value and benefit of the abstract is a reality. One needs to consider and to hold on to the ultimate value which is the ultimate goodness, freedom, as a goal that all can achieve.¹⁶

Nevertheless science influences Payutto's views. He perceived that there was a definite law, 'the law of nature',¹⁷ not under the power of anyone, regulating nature's own existence, known as the 'normality (*thammada* - ธรรมดา) of nature'.¹⁸ He analyzed things in nature and their relationship as 'processes'; like a medical doctor explaining the processes and relationship of the different organs in the human body. Payutto uses the mechanical engine as a model to look at the natural working of human spiritual and emotional processes. He used the expression, 'the mechanics of the heart and mind (กลไกของจิตใจ)' to describe the mechanics of the mental and emotional processes.¹⁹ He perceived that the various phenomena that occur in the human heart and mind are like the natural phenomena in nature:

Humans bring themselves into the natural process as one of the many variables which are causes and effects in nature and thus all the various variables move forward according to the law of nature.

The process of sense reception (กระบวนการรับรู้) exists for the process of worldly indulgence (กระบวนการเสพสุขโลก), or in other words, for the process of *samsāra*.²⁰

¹⁶ Payutto (1995a), 211.

¹⁷ Buddhādāsa also uses this same term.

¹⁸ Visalo. (1999), 28.

¹⁹ Payutto (1995c), 172.

²⁰ Payutto (1989d), 9, 38-39.

As for the miraculous stories and beings, realms of heavens and hells, life after death, Payutto does not attempt to use modern scientific methods to justify or reject them. He places more importance on the attitudes regarding these things than on the beliefs themselves. If the beliefs assist people to do good and not evil without having to make supplication to sacred beings to help them, then they are acceptable. It is not acceptable to do good in propitiation or in fear. Doing good without expecting benefits now or in the next life is far better, as the good deed is for the sake of a better world. Payutto, however, does not deny belief in subsequent lives and states that to believe in the results of *kamma* occurring in and affecting the next life is *lokiyasammādiṭṭhi* (โลกียสัมมาทิฏฐิ),²¹ helping humans to the righteous path.²² Benefits in the future beyond realization in this life is *samparāyikattha* making one, ‘feel relieved and be confident that one has done good *kamma* and thus has insurance for future lives’.²³ Payutto believes in the human ability to attain *nibbāna* in this life:²⁴

To believe and have confidence in the ingenuity of the Lord Buddha as the founder, the example or the leader of human beings is evidence for the potential in all human beings. Human beings can comprehend the truth of *sajjadhamma* and attain the ultimate benefit by their perseverance in developing themselves in the quest for the ultimate. To believe in the *paññā* of the Lord Buddha in attaining enlightenment, means to believe and to have confidence in human wisdom in comprehending the truth of *sajjadhamma*, in other words, belief and confidence in all human beings.²⁵

Nibbāna, which is Buddhism’s ultimate goal, can be achieved by humans in this life when they strive for and make themselves alert and ready enough for it. One need not wait till the next life for it... *nibbāna* can be

²¹ The right view of the world.

²² Payutto (1995b), 169, 132-135.

²³ Payutto (2000a), 8.

²⁴ Buddhādāsa had the same view:

Everybody can experience *nibbāna* in this life. Even in our daily life, while one is working, it is not only limited to when one sits, closes one’s eyes in meditation. One can taste *nibbāna* in every breath that one breathes, because there are many levels of *nibbāna*. *Nibbāna* does not occur only when one eliminates all *kilesa* and becomes an *arahant*.
Buddhādāsa (1998d), 30

²⁵ Payutto (1995c), 424 – 425.

achieved by all whether male or female, rich or poor, from whatever nation or caste, lay or ordained.²⁶

This view that *nibbāna* is achievable by all is not new to Thai Buddhism but it had been lost.²⁷

5.2.2 Buddhism and society

The majority folk Buddhists have gradually become individualistic, the social dimension of Buddhism largely lost and responsibility to society missed out.²⁸ Payutto strove to counter this trend and pointed out that Buddhism has not only *dhamma* but also *vinaya*. *Dhamma* is the truth that Buddha discovered. *Vinaya* is the law, rules for human society to live by according to *dhamma*, or *dharmavinaya*.²⁹ *Vinaya* had been greatly overlooked and as a consequence, declined in importance. To emphasise only the *dhamma* and disregard *vinaya*, is not an accurate understanding of Buddhism.³⁰ Buddhism, while emphasizing the individual, also gives importance to the social dimension. Payutto believed the Buddha's teaching included, 'Laying the foundation, structure and system for the community, and for the larger society, so all human beings can live together in harmony and all benefit from *dhamma*.'³¹ Payutto demonstrated the relationship between the individual and society.³² The result of the individual practising *dhamma* has a consequence not only for the individual but for the whole society:

²⁶ Payutto (1995c), 371.

²⁷ *Nibbāna* had become an unreachable ideal for a normal Thai person to attain in this life. The only hope was for one to accumulate *boon* and avoid *bap*, until in one's future life, there was enough *boon* for the attainment of *nibbāna*, thus resting one's hope on *boon* as if it were a sacred thing that could rescue one.

²⁸ See chapter one.

²⁹ Payutto (1995d), 10.

³⁰ Payutto (1985), 4-5.

³¹ Payutto (1998d), 16.

³² Buddhādāsa did the same, emphasizing not individual morality but also social responsibility and morality: 'Buddhism does not only have the individual dimension but also the social dimension.'

Buddhādāsa (1974b), 73

Kamma not only has an effect on the individual's spirituality, mind, personality and way of life, but it cannot be overlooked that *kamma* also impacts society.³³

In several of his books Payutto explained the *dhamma* not just as personal but also as social responsibility. For example he taught *mettakayakamma* (เมตตาการุณกรรม) – to use the individual's potential for the benefit of society, *mettamanokamma* (เมตตาเมตตากรรม) – to think, examine and plan so as all in society can benefit, and *silsamanyata* (ศีลสามัญญตา) – not to be the cause of disruption or suffering to society but to be disciplined and follow society's rules.³⁴ Payutto explained that *dhamma* covers truths regarding nature (*sajjadhamma*), which includes principles that society lays down for the benefit of all, enabling all to reach the ultimate benefit of freedom, of *vimutti* (*nibbāna*). These principles of truth, righteousness and goodness are *vinaya*.

Payutto's interpretation of *dhamma* includes the social dimension and captures the real essence and intent of *dhamma*, making Buddhist teaching more meaningful and relevant to modern Thai society.³⁵ Modern living has to deal not just with the personal and interpersonal level but also with the impersonal level. Modern technology has made the

Dhammic Socialism (ธรรมสังคมนิยม) described that all things are dependent on each other and have a cause-and-effect relationship, known as *itippajjayata* (อิทิปปัจจยตา- Dynamic relationship):

Each should give up his own benefit as much as possible for the benefit of the whole society and should not take advantage. Those with power, who can produce, and have much, should share their surplus for the benefit of others in the society.

Buddhadāsa (1974b), 34

The work of Payutto and Buddhadāsa has led Thai Buddhists to a better realization that they have a responsibility to their society.

³³ Payutto (1995c), 187-188.

³⁴ Payutto (1993a), 8-106.

³⁵ Other Buddhist thinkers share similar views. e.g. Praves Vasri wrote:

Though Buddhism is good, one wonders why it seems not to have the power to help solve social problems. It is because Thai Buddhists are not interested and do not understand the social dimension of Buddhism. They are only interested in themselves for themselves how they themselves can escape *kilesa* and this to the extent that society deteriorates. They do not realize that when society deteriorates it impacts all in society.

Vasri (1987), 16

world a smaller community and interaction is global. For Payutto social morality extends to responsibility for natural resources, the environment and social property globally. This new dimension of Buddhism makes it more attractive. The *dhamma* now relates to all aspects of life, not just the personal, or interpersonal but also the global community:

Buddhism awaits the ability of Thai Buddhists to demonstrate its full potential, which is tremendous, to benefit the world; to advance world civilization, enabling mankind to develop *paññā* to the full.³⁶

Payutto has opened up a new role for Buddhism in the worldwide community. Payutto presents Buddhism not only as a personal religion for personal salvation, for freedom - *nibbāna*, but as a Buddhist worldview for living. Buddhism can, he claims, make a great impact; it can change and benefit the world and the whole of humanity. In his judgment, analysis and critique of the world, he demonstrates the universality of Buddhism by applying his Buddhist worldview to all aspects of life. Buddhist principles are used as the basis for viewing the world and situations, for evaluating, comparing, and solving problems. He applied Buddhist principles to Economics, Science, Social Science, Arts, Psychology, Law, Government and Politics.³⁷ Payutto does not merely evaluate whether Buddhist morality is upheld in the subject under discussion, he goes deeper by analyzing the fundamentals, and the principle thoughts behind the knowledge systems to judge whether they are based on the truth, and comply with *dhamma*, the law of nature:

When looking at economics from a Buddhist perspective, one will find that economics perceives the needs of human beings from one angle, without considering the abstract quality of human needs - which are part of human nature and are needed for a more accurate understanding. Modern economics should not overlook this aspect so economics can thus be complete.³⁸

³⁶ Payutto (1989c), 58

³⁷ Visalo (1999), 24

³⁸ Payutto (1988b), 23-24

The truth that Science investigates is incomplete. Science emphasizes only the physical aspect, the abstract part of nature is overlooked. The world - nature has both the physical and non-physical and so does humanity. Thus the truth from the perspective of science is incomplete. Science therefore cannot fully comprehend *sajjadhamma*.³⁹

Payutto not only used Buddhism as his framework in evaluating the fundamental principles of the different sciences, he also considered whether the motivation, aim and ultimate goal had any bearing on assisting humans to develop their full potential, achieving the ultimate goodness in life, the ultimate freedom. For Payutto, the Buddhist worldview has human development at its centre. When speaking of development, the west combines development with the environment, but Payutto considers that for development to be lasting, human development has to be included along with economic development and ecology.⁴⁰ Society and the environment directly relate to human development. Therefore all the sciences, all the various bodies of knowledge that form the basis and ground work for human existence have to support and assist humanity to develop and achieve fullness of life which is the ultimate freedom. *Dhamma* is the basis for their evaluation:

Buddhism considers *vinaya* or the systems, rules and regulations for living. A society can bear good results only if its systems are according to *dhamma*. They not only need to have honourable motives and goals, but also need to be based on the foundation of truth according to the law of nature, grounded in *sajjadhamma* and morality (จริยธรรม).⁴¹

Payutto has given Buddhism a new status in modern Thai society. Buddhism as a worldview plays an important role in dealing with life both at the individual level and at the worldwide level. It offers solutions and a Buddhist perspective on all aspects of life. Buddhism no longer plays a passive role but an active role offering guidelines,

³⁹ Payutto (1995a), 120.

⁴⁰ Payutto (1992), 174 -176.

⁴¹ Payutto (1995d), 8- 11.

suggestions, methodology, and solutions to problems.⁴² It can be seen that Payutto's Buddhist worldview is based on the crucial belief that freedom and ultimate goodness exist. All human beings have the potential to achieve this ultimate goal. This potential in human beings can become a reality when it has the backing of the various life-supporting systems: environmental, political, economic and social, based on and functioning according to *dhamma*.

In developing a Buddhist worldview, Payutto had to redefine some modern concepts, several of which are western influenced, to be part of Buddhism. These concepts influence people's thoughts and the value systems in Thai society. Payutto redefined them to relate to Buddhism fulfilling the ultimate intention and benefit for humanity. For instance, Payutto saw freedom (เสรีภาพ) to be generally understood as 'the ability for people to do as they wish', he redefined it as 'the ability for people to maximize their potential for the benefit of society'. Then he redefined democracy as 'Everyone in society using their ability, their knowledge in assisting each other to solve problems and promote well-being in society so all can live together and develop themselves to the full.'⁴³ Equality (ความเสมอภาค), which is generally understood as 'protecting oneself and demanding equal opportunities and rights in seeking self benefit' became 'the circumstances and situation that will enable all to have the maximum opportunity to cooperate and create unity and benefit for the society'.⁴⁴ Independence (อิสรภาพ), generally understood as 'freedom from another's control', became 'happiness that depends the least on external factors. True independence is independence from within –

⁴² Visalo (1999), 36.

⁴³ Payutto (1996c), 77, 81.

⁴⁴ Payutto (1996e), 51.

internal independence'.⁴⁵ Human rights (สิทธิมนุษยชน) became 'the basic right for one to develop oneself'.⁴⁶

Payutto uses these new revised terms as part of Buddhism. For Payutto they are necessary for the creation of the Buddhist worldview as words and terms have great influence on determining how one thinks, one's perceptions and attitudes, and ultimately how one behaves and acts. Payutto perceives that to give new meanings to the words, making them congruent with Buddhism, will facilitate the right attitude towards the world enabling the people to lead a life more in harmony with *dhamma* principles. Payutto skilfully uses language and methods of communication to appeal to modern society and his work covers topics that are relevant to contemporary Thailand. He responds to challenges, offering suggestions by using *dhamma* to explain them and applying *dhamma* to various situations - to social problems, the environment, technology, economic crises, politics, national development, and so on.

5.3 Payutto's understanding of Christianity

As this section unfolds, it will become apparent that Payutto gives little evidence of understanding Christian doctrines. What Payutto does understand is that historically Christianity has posed a political threat, as evident from chapters one and two. From the Christian side this perception needs to be recognised, explained and answered, and Christians must be prepared to face the possibility of trouble. Payutto's perception of Christianity highlights the need for dialogue. Thai Christians have largely neglected this need and, as it will become clear, their beliefs are brushed aside by their majority

⁴⁵ Payutto (1998b), 29,34.

⁴⁶ Payutto (1988a), 8.

Buddhist fellow-countrymen. How Payutto formed his perception of Christianity and its implications will be considered.

Though Payutto has written numerous books and uses Buddhism to respond to various areas and topics, very little of his writing relates to Christianity. This is in direct contrast to Buddhādāsa, who actually engaged in dialogue with Christianity with the aim of mutual understanding between the two religions. Not only did Buddhādāsa engage in dialogue with Christianity on several occasions in his sermons and lectures, he would also use illustrations and examples from Christianity, and quotations from the Bible. However, in Payutto's lecture, 'Threats to Buddhism in Thailand', given in 2001 and published the following year, he described the threats as internal and external. The internal threats are from the decline of the *sangha*: the weakness of its government, lack of direction, the lax *vinaya*, and monks' shortcomings especially in educational status. The external threats were perceived as from Christianity, westerners, and Islam. At the least he is suspicious of Christianity, at the most he is hostile - to the motives rather than to the doctrine.

From his various other writings it can be seen that in terms of attitude and understanding towards other religions, Payutto emphasized that Buddhists should have attitudes of mutual acceptance and respect towards people of other religions with the aim of living together as equals in state and status.⁴⁷ Payutto urged religious groups to reconsider their roles, to look deep into the foundation of their religion, its teachings and principles to see whether there are attitudes of acceptance and respect towards other religions. Payutto believed that religions should teach people to see

⁴⁷ Payutto (1998b), 16-17.

others as equals, to accept and respect each other.⁴⁸ He perceived that human rights, tolerance, and religions are tools to assist people in this era of diversity in thoughts and beliefs to live together without persecution, oppression or exploitation,⁴⁹ without fear, mistrust or competition, and live with the attitude of cooperation and *mettā* so that all in society can live in peace and harmony:

The kindness that one has, has to develop to the stage that in Buddhism is called *appamaññā*⁵⁰, a kindness with no boundaries. One that is not limited to any group or thing but is truly universal not kindness of the divisive type or partiality.⁵¹

To live otherwise will end in strife or compromise. To live as equals with the attitude of cooperation will lead to harmony and unity among religions.⁵²

Despite his emphasis on living in harmony with others, Payutto further strengthened the link between Buddhism and nationalism. Payutto urged Thais to recognize threats from the past and thus to avoid them. He said, 'Threats to Buddhism are also threats to the nation and the whole of Thai society.'⁵³ Payutto pointed out that all through history, Thais have not had feelings of aversion for or prejudice against foreigners; they are broad-minded and can get along well with others. This is because of Buddhist teachings. For instance, *mettā-karuṇā* is universal and inclusive.⁵⁴ Unfortunately others may not be genuine or sincere. A true Buddhist who is advanced in the practice of *dhamma* needs also be *appamāda*⁵⁵ with *satisampajañña*.⁵⁶ Payutto related that at the time of King Narai, the French came to Siam with the intention of persuading the

⁴⁸ Payutto (1999f), 96.

⁴⁹ Payutto (2002c), 20.

⁵⁰ อัมปมาญญา - the unbounded states; the illimitables.

⁵¹ Payutto (2002c), 26.

⁵² Payutto (1998b), 97.

⁵³ Payutto (2002c), 8.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 11.

⁵⁵ อัมปมาทะ - heedful, careful.

⁵⁶ สติสัมปชัญญะ - mindfulness and awareness.

king to convert to Christianity, believing the people would then follow suit. Payutto pointed out that the French missionaries had hidden intentions and did not really intend to promote good relations between the two nations.⁵⁷

Payutto further questioned the true intention of the second Vatican Council. He observed a change in the attitude of the Catholics. The new policy was to use dialogue for understanding and assimilation. Catholics set up 'the commission for inter-religious dialogue' (คณะกรรมการศาสนาสัมพันธ์) to promote mutual co-operation, build understanding and unity between religions.⁵⁸ Payutto questioned the Catholics' new policy of 'assimilation' - whether the true intention was for harmony and unity or whether yet again there were other hidden intentions. Catholics have used assimilation in all areas, from religious teachings, vocabulary, ceremony, art and architecture:

The Catholics imitate Thai architecture and use it for their own, not just the 'Thai style' but 'Buddhist style'. Even the Buddhist set of tables for worship, replacing the Buddha image with the crucifix, was taken for Catholic use in their churches. Some even included display of the Buddha image.⁵⁹

The Buddhist *kathin* ceremony⁶⁰ has been adapted and given Christian meaning for a Catholic ceremony until today. I do not see any logic or reason for doing so, as there is no link whatsoever in the meaning, whether in terms of religious principles or cultural background. It just causes more confusion and thus criticism of it, is justified.⁶¹

Payutto perceived that all these efforts may be for harmony and unity on the surface, but, as history does repeat itself, there may be the hidden intention to absorb Buddhism.

⁵⁷ Payutto (2002c), 14 -15 ; see chapter one for further details.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 29.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 30.

⁶⁰ ศำฬากฐิน - The Buddhist ceremony where the laity take their offerings to the temple before the Buddhist lent.

⁶¹ Payutto (2002c), 40.

Moreover, Payutto observed that the new Catholic policy was to re-interpret Buddhist *dhamma* to suit Catholic teachings. The Catholics used Buddhist terms and *dhamma* principles for explaining Christianity to Buddhists:

Since Christianity came to Thailand for ever so long, their Christian words and terms have already become widely known enough so that they should use their own original words and terms for a more accurate and clearer communication. Instead the Christians chose to use words and terms in a way that causes misunderstanding, confusion and ambiguity.⁶²

Payutto perceived that Christians were using Buddhist *dhamma* to explain Christianity in such a way that it agreed with Christian teachings. This was not appropriate as it appeared to be an effort to incorporate Buddhism subordinate to Christianity:

To place Christianity as 'the greater' is by positioning the Buddha as the one whom God sent. There is documentary evidence of Christians claiming that God sent the Buddha to prepare the people in the east for the coming of Jesus Christ.

The *dhamma* that the Buddha taught has been re-positioned as what God revealed to the Buddha to teach. They use Buddhist *dhamma* explaining the *dhamma* in such a way that it agrees with Christianity.

Even the Buddhist *tilakkhaṇa*, they say exists in the Bible. Checking the Bible, I do not know how they could possibly have referred the terms to the Bible as the words and the context is not at all congruent, they simply do not go together.

They even concluded that the Buddha taught *aniccatā*, *dukkhatā*, and stopped at *anattatā* because he had to wait for Jesus Christ to come and further teach *attā*. They say Jesus Christ came to make it complete, that is, one needs to go through the *attā* of Jesus.⁶³

For evidence and support, Payutto gave several examples of Catholic literature to illustrate his point. For instance:

In the beginning before all things was God. God was the creator of the universe. God established the *paṭiccasamuppāda*, to rule the world he created. *Paṭiccasamuppāda* is God's plan for the world and for human

⁶² Payutto (2002c), 40.

⁶³ Payutto (2002c), 31 - 33.

beings. God revealed this to the Buddha, thus the Buddha achieved enlightenment and was able to teach others.⁶⁴

God used *dhamma* to create all things. *Dhamma* became born a true human being (i.e. *Dhamma* came to be born as Jesus) *Dhamma* who is *nijjang* (นิจจัง – permanent, eternal), *sukkam* (สุข – happiness, perfect bliss) and *attā* came to be born a human being, who is *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anattā* so that human beings can have *nijjang*, *sukkam* and *attā* from the *dhamma*. The *Dhamma* is God's only son, becoming human, who received the state of *nijjang*, *sukkam* and *attā*. When Christians die *anattā* will disappear, vanish, leaving *attā* in the *lokuttara* which is perfect *nijjang* and *sukkam*.⁶⁵

Payutto criticizes this use of *dhamma* and perceived that it posed a great threat to Buddhism, as well as degrading it by setting Christianity above Buddhism. Payutto argued that this kind of *dhamma* usage has hidden, insincere, and illegitimate intentions. He called for Buddhists to diligently study Buddhism to understand the true meaning of Buddhist teaching so they will be on their guard and not be deceived. Payutto perceived that if the *dhamma* usage had the sincere intention of comparative religious studies then it would be acceptable. In the present case, however, it should be criticized because its strategies were to mislead and to assimilate.

Payutto condemned the Thai authorities for their negligence in allowing the Christian missionaries to use money, rewards and privileges to persuade Thai people to convert to Christianity. To convert people from one religion to another by way of using an allurement, *amisyualawr* (อามิสเหื้อลล่อ), is wrong.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Juabsamai, Manus, Father in *Saengtham* Magazine year 5 Vol. II May- Aug 1981, 102-104 quoted in Payutto (2002c), 32.

⁶⁵ From *Sabdahsarn*, a weekly magazine published by St. Joseph Church Baanpong district, Rajjaburee province, quoted in Payutto (2002c), 33.

⁶⁶ Payutto (2002c), 42.

Payutto called for the Thai people and the government to beware of the imminent external threats to Buddhism and to realize that Buddhism and Thailand have to go together:

To know Buddhism does not mean to know it as a mere religion but to know Buddhism in its appropriate status of belonging to Thais. It is something that Thai people relate to, it is part of the flesh and blood in a Thai body, it is the essence of being Thai, not only in terms of history and culture.⁶⁷

Payutto has a rather negative attitude towards Christianity. His perception of Christianity is based on suspicion and mistrust. This is not surprising when looking back into the history of Christianity in Thailand. Payutto used strong words when referring to Christians, as those who are deceitful and need to be treated warily. From another perspective, Payutto's criticism may have been an effort to keep the Buddhist-Christian conflict on a scholarly debate level and, thus, defuse violence.

Payutto also urged the Thai people to re-examine the current condition of the *sangha* which he extensively described as the internal threat to Thai Buddhism. These details, however, are not within the scope of this thesis. Nevertheless, Paisal Visalo, a modern Thai scholar monk, has similar concerns. He pointed out that the *sangha* is in a very bad state; monks who misbehave are frequently highlighted in the media, and the media frequently criticize the *sangha*'s role or the lack of it, in society. Society has changed so much that the monks find themselves left behind. The *sangha*'s image has fallen to its lowest in history. Given this situation the monks feel attacked and put the blame on the external threats, namely Christianity:

For self defense, external factors can be blamed as the cause of problems. External factors are blamed as ... shaking the faith people have in the *sangha* with the motivation to destroy Buddhism. There is an increasing

⁶⁷ Ibid., 45.

trend to anti- Christianity among the monks and this trend is spilling over to the general public stirring Buddhists to act. This anti- Christianity trend can be easily stirred up and has fast response and immediate results.⁶⁸

Though these reactions and movements are due to the decline of the *sangha*, which really is an internal factor, the public suspect that it is a result of a conspiracy to destroy Buddhism. Paisal Visalo *Bhikku* warned:

There are movements and groups believing that the problems that are occurring in the *sangha* are part of a plan to destroy Buddhism. Those perceived to be behind the plan are other religions, particularly Christianity. This view seems to have made the anti- Christianity trend stronger with fiercer reactions because it has been perceived as the fight for the survival of one's religion. Even though these Buddhist groups at present have this 'conspiracy theory' but I fear that in the future it can easily become a 'fundamentalist movement' if they feel pushed and perceive that Buddhism has retreated to a corner- the very edge of Thai society.⁶⁹

Given this situation, Payutto pleaded for the Thais to strive for a true understanding of *dhamma*, having *mettā-karuṇā* as well as *paññā* to deal with situations and threats and be alert.⁷⁰ Payutto perceived that Thailand faces social problems as a result of the fact that Thais do not really know Buddhism. From Payutto's study of the bloody history of Christianity and Islam in Europe and the Americas, he concluded that if Buddhism is no longer in the majority, Thailand will no longer be peaceful:

Thailand is a peaceful country, living like brothers and sisters, because the majority are Buddhists but if there are fewer Buddhists there will be trouble. One can say that when there remains only 90 % Buddhists trouble will start, problems will occur. Now Buddhists are only 94 % of the population and there is already trouble brewing. ... To solve Thai social problems is easy, not complicated. When Thais are mostly Buddhist, in several areas there are 100% Buddhists but they are ignorant of Buddhism. They have the wrong beliefs, leading to wrong practice and behaviour and ultimately leading to numerous social problems Therefore the easiest and

⁶⁸ Visalo. (2003), 479-480.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 480-481.

⁷⁰ Payutto (2002c), 6-7, 86-87.

simplest way to solve social problems is to help them to know the true Buddhism.⁷¹

5.4 Summary

Payutto's work covers two major areas; **Firstly**, the academic exposition of *dhamma* by accurately explaining *dhamma* in an understandable way so people can appreciate and see its true value. Payutto's academic works have become reference books for modern day Buddhist studies. Three key works are: *Phutthatham*, his systematic Buddhism; *Dictionary of Buddhism* in two volumes one Thai - Pali (ฉบับประมวลศัพท์), and one Thai, Pali and English (ฉบับประมวลธรรม); and *Thammanooncheewit* - Buddhism for the laity. **Secondly**, comes the application of *dhamma* to everyday life. In several of his books, Payutto proposed and demonstrated how a Buddhist worldview can be applied in the modern context and how the application of *dhamma* can benefit not only the individual but society and the world. This has made Buddhist *dhamma* more relevant and appealing to modern Thais who now see the value of Buddhism.

Payutto places more importance on the academic side as he believes that with an accurate understanding of *dhamma*, one can apply it to daily living and benefit from it, both as an individual and as a society. Moreover, it will enable Buddhism to continue for ever. For Payutto the key to preserving Theravada Buddhism is to preserve its *dhamma*:

Dhammavinaya (ธรรมวินัย) is the flesh and body of Buddhism. True Buddhism exists in its *dhammavinaya*. To preserve Buddhism one must preserve *dhammavinaya* and hold on to *dhammavinaya* as a principle of Buddhism.⁷²

⁷¹ Payutto (2002c), 18-19, 47.

⁷² Payutto (2002c), 67.

It seems that Payutto's negative perception of Christian motives has hindered and deterred him from looking at the Christian doctrine itself, though his respected predecessor Buddhādāsa had done. Ideally Payutto would not only have complemented and developed Buddhādāsa's work in terms of doctrinal Buddhism, but also in the dialogue between Christianity and Buddhism. Nevertheless, Payutto's perception of Christianity has highlighted the urgency of the long neglected need for a meaningful and fruitful Christian-Buddhist dialogue. Thai Christians must be ready to answer for their beliefs and as Paisal Visalo *Bhikku* forewarned, Thai Christians must be prepared to face the possibility of trouble emerging from some Buddhist fundamentalist groups.

Part Three : Christians in dialogue - a closer look

Chapter six: The Cross under the Bo Tree's shade, a study of Christian responses

In the past fifty years, research and writings from Thai Christians responding to or relating to Buddhism have been scarce. Most of the work, written largely by missionaries and foreigners, has been on either Thai church history or the missionaries' role and influence on Thai society – in education, healthcare, science and technology - and the modernising of Thailand. Some writings have dealt with evangelising, church growth and church planting in the Thai urban and rural contexts, and Thai Christian and intercultural exchange.¹

Christian work that responds to Buddhism to promote mutual understanding between the two religions is almost non-existent. However, seven works have been found that relate to dialogue with Buddhism. Four have been dissertations produced by Thai Protestant Christians: Maen Pongudom, Parichart Suwanbubbha, Seree Lorgunpai and Nantachai Mejudhon, and two by Thai Catholics, Seri Phongphit and Cherdchai Lertjitlekka. Given their potential benefits, the works are not widely known among Thai Christians; only Lertjitlekka's thesis has been published. The seventh, 'Talk in the Shade of the Bo Tree', is the published lectures of Wan Petchsongkram, a former Buddhist monk who later became the pastor of Romklaw (ร่มเกล้า) Church, Bangkok. He attempted to set Buddhism in a Christian perspective in the hope that evangelists would use Buddhist terms and thoughts as vehicles for the expression of the Christian faith. Each of these works will

¹ The Church of Christ in Thailand, Office of History Library in Chiangmai compiled a list of research and work done about Christianity in Thailand. The list was published in McFarland (1999), liii – lxxxiii.

be considered in chronological order, bringing out the salient points relating to dialogue with Thai Buddhists.

6.1 'Talk in the Shade of the Bo Tree'

In 1972 Petchsongkram gave, in Thai, a series of lectures in apologetics to a group of Christian leaders at the Thailand Baptist Theological Seminary. Petchsongkram suggested guidelines for presenting the Christian message to Thai Buddhists in terms which they would find intelligible. Petchsongkram had been a monk for eight years and studied the *dhamma*, reaching *Parian V*.² His work, printed and published in 1975 and edited by Frances E. Hudgins, was an English translation of his lectures.

Petchsongkram explained the basic Buddhist worldview: *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā*, the four noble truths, and outlined the Buddhist concept of person, so totally different from the Judaeo-Christian one. He indicated significant areas of similarity and disagreement, and warned about teachings that might be misconstrued. For example, ascribing a personality to God and describing God as 'loving' or 'wrathful' would make a lesser being of 'God' to an educated Buddhist. Christianity would be seen as inferior, not having penetrated to the truth about life and the universe. Likewise, the Christian use of 'love' would be better expressed by '*mettā*'. Petchsongkram quotes a Thai proverb, 'Danger arises from what we love'.³ The Buddhist view of *anattā* rules out love, if it has any attributes of attachment, as a favourable quality – it is one to be eliminated.⁴

² This was a higher level than Buddhādāsa who was top for the Parian III and failed Parian IV exam. The seven grades of national Pali exams for fully ordained monks progress from Parian III Prayok to Parian IX Prayok.

³ Petchsongkram (1975), 15.

⁴ This will be further discussed in chapter eight.

Petchsongkram agreed with Buddhādāsa on there being two levels of language.⁵ He commented on Buddhists' likening God to *avijjā*.⁶ In Buddhist thought *avijjā*, creation, is a source of suffering and pain. A god responsible for pain and suffering must be inferior. He also commented on likening God to *kamma*. The educated Buddhist will be horrified by the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. They understand *kamma* to be the inescapable law of cause and effect, so Christ must have committed the gravest of unskilful actions in a former life to have suffered thus. Buddhists see the cross as 'the basest doctrine'.⁷ Petchsongkram asserted, 'The church in Thailand today absolutely must learn to give a reason for her faith in *intelligible and convincing* terms' (italics mine).⁸ It is unfortunate that his lectures passed almost unnoticed, and were never published in Thai. The tapes of his Thai lectures and Thai transcription from which the published English translation originated have since been lost.⁹

6.2 'The Problem of Religious Language'

Phongphit focuses on the philosophy of language. His work has useful insights which contribute to the dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity.¹⁰ He concludes in his study of Wittgenstein that 'the language of philosophy is the most apt for the expression of religion':

Wittgenstein's later thought is proposed as a method for mutual understanding of Buddhist and Christian religious language, which are considered as different 'forms of life', or also different 'games' of the same family.¹¹

⁵ Petchsongkram (1975), 128.

⁶ Petchsongkram (1975), 139, 76ff.

⁷ Ibid., 15.

⁸ Ibid., 204.

⁹ Confirmed by Petchsongkram in an interview in August 2004.

¹⁰ Phongphit (1978), 339.

¹¹ Ibid., 339.

If Wittgenstein is right in considering language as a 'form of life', then one has to learn another's language in order to understand another's form of life.¹²

This study does not intend to compare the 'family resemblances' between the two religions, it intends rather to propose two ways of making use of religious language as presented by Buddhādāsa Bhikku and Ian Ramsey. Wittgenstein's insight prompts us to 'look and see' how a 'language-game' is played in order to understand its rules.¹³

Phongphit finds that Buddhādāsa is also concerned with language. Buddhādāsa had identified two kinds of language, religious and worldly – in Buddhist terms *lokuttara* and *lokiya* respectively¹⁴:

Man who lives in the world and attached to the illusive phenomenal world, 'knows' only the *Lokiya* (the world) and its language. He fails to 'see' the reality, which is the *Lokutra*. He clings to the human and personal language, without 'understanding' the 'real' language, which is 'Dhammic' language. This is the language of 'religion', distinct from the language of the 'world', and also the language of 'moral', as the initial step towards the language of Dhamma.

Dhamma language is the language spoken by people who have gained deep insight into truth, Dhamma. Having perceived Dhamma, they speak in terms appropriate to their experience, and so Dhamma language comes to be. Experience of Dhamma is thus a 'transcendental' experience, it is the experience of *Lokutra*.

Buddhadāsa does not mean to treat the question of language as a separate object for speculation, but always links it with the experience of the speaker. Therefore, the one who does not 'speak' the Dhamma language is the one who does not 'realize' the Dhamma. Language is precisely here 'a form of life' in Wittgenstein's term. The 'speaker' of Dhamma language, however, has also to speak the language of the world. The point is that he can discern its meaning, and recognizes the twofold language.¹⁵

Phongphit also finds that in Buddhādāsa's work, terms used to express the *dhamma* language and human language are not always clear.¹⁶ 'The "Absolute" reality of the

¹² Ibid., 2.

¹³ Phongphit (1978), 339.

¹⁴ Ibid., 123 f.

¹⁵ Ibid., 123- 124.

¹⁶ Ibid., 125.

lokutra can not be exhaustly (sic) expressed in human language.’¹⁷ This limitation of religious language, Phongphit also finds echoed in Ramsey¹⁸ who believed that religious language, in order to be ‘religious’ and not common, scientific or any other variety of language, must lead to a disclosure, to a ‘eureka’, a revelation. Moreover any religious ‘disclosure’ brings with it an ‘and more’. This is so since God is infinite and the person receiving the disclosure is not.¹⁹ There must be something intuitive in the religious language that relates to the hearer and that speaks of God in a way that communicates to him/her. Both Buddhādāsa and Ramsey reach a similar conclusion that language falls short, there is no closure, when speaking of the ‘other’ whether the other be *Dhamma* and *nibbāna* or God and the kingdom of God.

Phongphit asserts that one’s understanding of one’s own religion is only made whole when ‘one finds out that it is no longer possible to comprehend one’s own religion without considering the reality of the other religions.’²⁰ Moreover, ‘Religion-encounter should not make one lose one’s identity but, on the contrary, help one to find out one’s real identity.’²¹ ‘Dialogue is not a new strategy for “conversion” of others into the Christian religion. It is more a way of sharing the spiritual patrimonies of other religions.’²² Phongphit says this in the context of “attitude”²³ asserting:

The best way to approach this is to have an open attitude and readiness to learn from another in making contact with those who are realizing their own religious truth claim.²⁴

¹⁷ Phongphit (1978), 126.

¹⁸ Ian Ramsey (1915-1972) Bishop of Durham 1966, previously Nolloth Professor of the Christian Religion at Oxford. Writer on religious language. ‘The first theological leader of a Christian church who has done modern analytical philosophers the honour of taking them seriously in order to think with them instead of dismissing or ignoring them... A vox clamantis in deserto.’ W. Zuurdeeg, ‘An Analytical Philosophy of Religion’, London 1959, 66-67 quoted from Phongphit (1978), 182.

¹⁹ Phongphit (1978), 199ff.

²⁰ Ibid., 1-2.

²¹ Ibid., 15.

²² Ibid., 17.

²³ An important point that has been noted several times in the historical survey (chapters one & two) and from the study of Payutto (chapter five).

²⁴ Phongphit (1978), 15.

Phongphit warns the person approaching dialogue against drawing parallels, particularly in the discussion of *kamma*, as confusion may well ensue. He is referring specifically to the concept of actions only being kammic when resulting from the will and the sense of self. Pragmatism is mixed up with determinism, which according to Buddhādāsa results from the misunderstanding of the doctrine of *kamma*.²⁵

The question of karma is actual in everyday life of the Buddhists. It is related to the question of birth and rebirth, thus to the law of dependent origination. Once again, Buddhāda distinguishes the language of Karma in two levels: the moral and the Lokutra. In moral level (sic), 'human' and 'personal' language is used. Karma in this level is divided into two kinds: black karma and white karma, with suffering and happiness as their related consequences (Palakarma). Concerning this argument, any parallel of moral philosophy familiar to the western mind should not be drawn, since it can only create confusion. ...

It is important to note here that this doctrine is often used by the people to justify their life and the events in everyday life. This is taken by Buddhāda as the elementary 'belief' of the moral level, which has to be transcended. ...

Karma in its real sense belongs to Lokutra. There is no duality of black Karma and white Karma. There is no consequence of such act, since it is void of will and desire. Here Karma becomes Kiriya, act of man, whose will is not involved... The act of the Arahant... is an act of which the detachment of 'I' and 'mine' is perfect. He is no more subject to will and desire. Human act turns to be an act of man, 'Karma' to be 'Kiriya'.²⁶

The problem of misunderstanding is wrapped up in the very nature of language:

Each language game has its rule, its term and vocabulary. Many of the words in language game (sic) may be definable only in terms of each other. Therefore, a mark of a language game is frequently the fact that its basic terms cannot be translated into the terms of another game without distortion of meaning. Furthermore, language game may be distinguished by differing method of verification (sic).²⁷

From his study of Ramsey, Phongphit finds that the basic language problem 'arises from the claim of religion to talk of what is seen and more than what is seen, using as the

²⁵ Phongphit (1978), 141- 142.

²⁶ An ordinary action void of will and desire is an action free of *kamma* (non-karmic). *Kiriya* is a Thai word meaning action, behaviour, to perform; Phongphit (1978), 141- 143.

²⁷ Phongphit (1978), 177.

basis of its currency language suited to observables.²⁸ Religious language has to be used with discernment and commitment. He quotes Ramsey as saying, 'Commitment without any discernment whatever is bigotry and idolatry; to have the discernment without an appropriate commitment is ... insincerity and hypocrisy.'²⁹

Phongphit tackles immortality under the heading 'the language of Christian faith'. He does this in his effort to achieve his 'purpose of mutual understanding between Buddhism and Christianity'.³⁰ He quotes Ramsey's argument that if death ends existence in space and time, then whatever passes through death must exist outside space and time. If personality cannot pass through death then "life after death" is a meaningless phrase.³¹ Phongphit follows Ramsey's argument for immortality using the concepts of duty and truth as examples of things that exist beyond time and space. The fact that 'I' cannot be objectified leads to the logically peculiar statement, 'I am dead.'³²

The argument about immortality is not separate from that about the elusiveness of 'I'. As we have seen, 'I' can never be exhaustively 'objectified'. Then to refer to the death of something is necessary to objectify it. In this way the 'I' cannot be spoken of as dead. Here is one of the few places in Ramsey's writings where he refers to the Buddhist doctrine concerning the self. ... Thus belief in immortality depends upon the meaning which the logically peculiar statement 'I am dead' has for us.³³

Another problem Phongphit sees as relevant for the relationship between Buddhism and Christianity is the problem of evil.³⁴ Phongphit points to concern about dualism when 'evil' and 'devil' are closely connected. If such dualism remains, there is, he claims, a difficulty for a cosmic disclosure. Phongphit finds Ramsey proposes finding some 'super-model' in terms of which 'god' and 'evil' can, here-and-now, be put together in

²⁸ Phongphit (1978), 193.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 199.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 264.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 264.

³² *Ibid.*, 266.

³³ *Ibid.*, 265 -266.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 284.

terms of a consistent story and points to the fact that 'the Hebrews were so conscious of the transcendence of God that for them there was no difficulty linking God in both good and evil'.³⁵

Phongphit mentions that the cross, when presented as appeasing God's wrath, is a major stumbling block for Buddhists. He finds Ramsey's suggested model of 'love' helpful. The cross reveals the cosmic character of self-giving love.³⁶ Ramsey's idea suggests that 'redeeming love' is 'the price to be paid for a freely responsible people', the 'super-model' which helps people to overcome evil. This idea would point to the primacy of 'love' rather than 'punishment', or 'wrath' and thus help lead to the cosmic disclosure – God.³⁷

Throughout his work, Phongphit expresses his desire 'for an open attitude to each other'.³⁸ He recognizes that Buddhism and Christianity 'do not share the same form of life.' By this he means that each conceives reality differently. There may be similarities, for example, 'God is absolute' and '*Dhamma* is absolute' but there is a depth of different meanings behind the surface likeness. Phongphit concludes, 'We can talk of 'family resemblances' but not of 'identity' or of 'commonness'.'³⁹

In pointing to the future Phongphit writes, 'The Buddhist point of view of Christianity as 'unreasonable' in its faith is not totally unjustified.'⁴⁰ According to Ramsey the philosophical theologian should 'elucidate the logical oddness that must of necessity belong to theological language'.⁴¹ Phongphit saw Ramsey, a western theologian, as a

³⁵ Phongphit (1978), 285.

³⁶ Ibid., 283.

³⁷ Ibid., 285.

³⁸ Ibid., 287.

³⁹ Ibid., 297-298.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 336.

⁴¹ Ibid., 337.

possible bridge person with Buddhists whose work should be studied by Thai theologians:

Ramsey's insight should be now developed in a way that Christian religious language may be rendered a more 'reasonable' language. It is the task of theology in Thailand to find out suitable models for religious language, the models taken from everyday experience of the people in the country. Since Thai culture is in a sense 'identified' with Buddhism, it is necessary that Buddhist models have to be the subject of inquiry...

There are already many Buddhist terms used in the Christian language, but many of them are used without much inquiry into the original meaning of the words. This has raised some confusion rather than mutual understanding.⁴² There are actually many attempts of integration of Christianity in Thai culture, yet we have to maintain that this integration is in the first place the task of theology as well as philosophy of religion. Without the right understanding of the 'integrating' and the 'integrated', namely Christianity and Buddhism, any other forms of integration will lack of the real fundament. Theology has to be 'tentative' if its task is to be fulfilled.⁴³

Phongphit quotes Ramsey as concluding:

Doctrine of Atonement exist (sic.) to point us to a cosmic disclosure around the cross, and to give us hints for reliable talking about what is disclosed.⁴⁴

Thai Christians need to talk with Buddhists about the cosmic disclosure at the cross in ways that are relevant and comprehensible to them.

6.3 'Apologetic and Missionary Proclamation'

Pongudom compared three apologetic missionary proclamations.⁴⁵ He considered how their religious convictions were proclaimed; how they valued the religio-philosophical thoughts and the cultural heritage of the people with whom they worked; and the strengths and weaknesses of their proclamations. He found that the American

⁴² Some of these confusions are picked up in chapter eight.

⁴³ Phongphit (1978), 337-338.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 282.

⁴⁵ The three groups were: The American Presbyterian Missionaries to Thai Buddhists; the early Church apologists to the Greeks; and the Venerable Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu to the Thai people.

Presbyterian Missionaries took over a hundred years to realise that their triple ministry of preaching, healing and teaching was not the most promising method and that they lacked understanding of Thai religio-philosophical thoughts and cultural heritage:

Not until the 1950s did they begin to realize that understanding Thai religion, Buddhism in particular, was important for their work. This realization was among the few and came too late, consequently, the Thai Christian community is left without substantial thoughts and literature for the continuation tasks of apologetical missionary proclamation.⁴⁶

In contrast to the American Presbyterian Missionaries, the early Church apologists to the Greeks were successful because they understood and used the religio-philosophical thought of the Greeks:

By seeking the points of contact between their faith and the faith of the people for whom they wrote they were able to make spiritual continuity clear for the converts. They made use of Greek terms and concepts, and consequently, a synthesis of indigenous Greek theology emerged. They were successful in translating the Christian truth to the mind of the Greeks.⁴⁷

As for Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu:

Great concern with the relevance of his religion has driven Buddhādāsa to interpret it more daringly. Though he is a Theravadic Buddhist he feels free, like the apologists did, to use terms and concepts from others in his apologetical missionary proclamation. He makes use of Mahayanist sunnata in particular to develop his Buddhadhammology. He offers himself to interpret Christianity through Buddhist spectacles by which Thai Christians can find both challenge and encouragement.⁴⁸

Pongudom concluded:

It becomes clear that the American missionaries, bound to their past, were not able to translate the Gospel to the Thai mind;... The early Church Christian missionary - apologists had a balance of freedom and faithfulness to the tradition in their apologetical missionary proclamation out of which they created spiritual continuity and a vital theology.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Pongudom, M. (1979), iv of abstract.

⁴⁷ Ibid., iv of abstract.

⁴⁸ Ibid., iv- v of abstract.

⁴⁹ Ibid., v of abstract.

Thai protestant churches need to develop 'spiritual continuity' and a 'vital theology'. Both 'Spiritual continuity' and 'vital theology' need dialogue to inform and guide the endeavour.

6.4 'Grace and Kamma'

Suwanbubbha explores how far the theology of the Church of Christ in Thailand (C.C.T.) has been influenced by the classic Buddhist notion of *kamma*.⁵⁰ The Christians of the C.C.T., being largely of American Presbyterian descent, base their theology on Calvin's teachings on grace and predestination. Suwanbubbha recognises differences and similarities between grace and *kamma*. She first explores what she describes as 'classic' Buddhist doctrines of *kamma* and then analyses the Calvinist doctrine of grace and predestination. Through a survey of Buddhists and Christians, she found support for her thesis that religion and culture are interdependent – that the doctrine of *kamma* has, to some extent, influenced the beliefs of Christians in the C.C.T. Suwanbubbha recognises two types of Buddhism which she calls kammic Buddhism and nibbanic Buddhism.⁵¹

Generally speaking, kammic or kammic Buddhism refers to the Buddhist practice of having white or bright *kamma*, whereas, nibbanic Buddhism is the Buddhist practice to have neither black nor white/bright *kamma*. In other words, kammic Buddhism leads people to have only good *kamma*, to have a better life or rebirth. Nibbanic Buddhism is beyond either good or bad *kamma* for ending rebirth to have *nibbāna*. Put another way, kammic Buddhism is popular Buddhism at the level of contemporary belief of most Thai people. Nibbanic Buddhism is canonical Buddhism at the level of classical scriptural belief of the Buddhist ideal persons. Kammic Buddhism focuses on making-merit especially giving, nibbanic Buddhism emphasizes the Buddhist path including morality, meditation and wisdom.⁵²

⁵⁰ Suwanbubbha (1994), 193.

⁵¹ Suwanbubbha probably got this idea of categorising Thai Buddhism from Winston King or Melford Spiro as indicated by her footnote 139 page 70. It is not one that is entertained by either Buddhādāsa or Payutto.

⁵² Suwanbubbha (1994), 70.

However, Buddhādāsa did not consider what Suwanbubbha describes as 'kammic Buddhism' a type of Buddhism but rather the result of the separation of *lokuttaradhamma* from *lokiyadhamma*. Suwanbubbha's kammic Buddhism would roughly cover what this thesis calls State and Folk Buddhism, while nibbanic Buddhism corresponds to Radical Buddhism.⁵³

Suwanbubbha's historical survey of missionary effort highlights the unfortunate attitude of most of the American missionaries. They equated bringing God's word with introducing modern science, medicine and education to the misguided heathen:

Protestant missionaries use science not only to attract Thai converts but also proclaim the word and the truth of God through direct attack on Buddhist teaching.⁵⁴

Suwanbubbha notes the missionaries' failure to understand the patron-client relationships in Thai society which are in fact based on the understanding of *kamma*.⁵⁵

Suwanbubbha emphasises the Buddhist doctrine of *kamma*,⁵⁶ so is speaking largely of 'folk Buddhism', and not the radical Buddhism which is the focus of this study.⁵⁷

However, her work confirms the rising tensions between Christianity and Buddhism due to ignorance and the need for dialogue:

This study reflects two urgent issues: 1) the importance of doing dialogue by way of comparative study of religious concepts in the two religions and 2) the realization of the interdependence of all things such as religion and culture as well as the interrelationship of understanding Christianity as the new and foreign religion requiring reinterpretation based on the indigenous religion... As a result from the realization of interdependence of all things, one has come to know that one cannot separate Thai Christians from indigenous culture based on Buddhist ideas. One cannot be confident in using a dualistic idea of thinking that one religion is better than another religion. The concrete examples are already seen from the work of missionaries in this study. The more one realizes the idea of

⁵³ See chapter one section 1.3.2 (The doctrinal development) and section 1.4 (Thai Buddhism).

⁵⁴ Suwanbubbha (1994), 160.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 72ff.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 14.

⁵⁷ She refers to only two works of Buddhādāsa's and two of Payutto's.

interdependence, the more one needs to do dialogue as well as to adopt the idea of contextualization in mission.⁵⁸

Her conclusion emphasises the urgency of dialogue and the inseparability of religion and culture.

6.5 'World lover, World leaver'

Lorgunpai's thesis aims at helping 'Thai Christians to find some common ground for dialogue with Thai Buddhists'.⁵⁹ He argued that the theological content of Ecclesiastes can be profitably studied in comparison with Buddhism.

Lorgunpai starts with a discussion of the nature of the book of Ecclesiastes, then a study of the history and main concepts of Thai Buddhism, and ends with a comparison of the two traditions, specifically, God and the law of *Kamma* ; the theological implication of *Hebel* (suffering in Hebrew) and *Dukkha* ; Observation and Meditation as ways of encountering the world; the Sages and *Arahants* as interpreters; work and merit-making as human activities; and joy and *nibbāna* as responses to what humankind has been given.

Lorgunpai finds that both Qohelet, the author of Ecclesiastes, and the Buddha have a common focus - human suffering. The difference comes in their estimate of the causes. Desire is, for the Buddha, the ultimate cause of suffering. For Qohelet there are several causes including both human failings and the fact that many things in life are beyond one's control:

⁵⁸ Suwanbubbha (1994), 283-284.

⁵⁹ Lorgunpai (1995), iv of abstract.

The Buddha looks for a way to end human suffering, recognising that if human beings continue to be reborn in the world, they will continue to suffer. He then suggests that human beings should break the cycle of rebirth and seek *nibbāna* or the state of emptiness. This state can be reached through strenuous meditation. Seeing that the pleasant things in this world are transitory and illusory, the Buddha decided to leave the world behind.⁶⁰

Whereas:

Qohelet believes that God has created this world with a definite plan, but humans lack the capacity to understand the present events of the world and are unable to predict the future. Qohelet advises human beings to enjoy life on a day-to-day basis, rather than hope for a better future. While admitting that there are many unpleasant things in this world, Qohelet still loves living in it.⁶¹

Lorgunpai concludes that, 'Qohelet is the world lover. The Buddha is the world leaver.'⁶²

6.6 'Buddhist *Paññā*'

Lertjitlekka, a Thai Catholic priest, centres on the study of dialogue between Christian morality and Theravada Buddhist ethics, aiming to gain improved self-understanding as well as mutual understanding. He does not underestimate the complexity of the two seemingly very different worldviews:

Keeping in mind the open spirit of Christian morality, there is no attempt to mix oil and water in the same glass, especially if one borrows the bits and pieces from divergent sources without regarding each other's presuppositions and traditional contexts.⁶³

He begins with Theravada Buddhist ethics and the Buddhist tradition. He describes at length the term *sīla* and the nature of the eightfold path before going on to Christian

⁶⁰ Lorgunpai (1995), iv of abstract.

⁶¹ Ibid., iv of abstract.

⁶² Ibid., iv of abstract.

⁶³ Lertjitlekka (1998), 1.

morality and its basis. The Buddhist path of *śīla*, *śamādhi* and *paññā* is the foundation of the Buddhist way of life. Christian morality, according to Lertjitlekka, is best understood as a personal vocation in terms of 'following Christ'. Christian moral life is manifested by following Christ, for which one has personal responsibility through moral acts.

Lertjitlekka looks for harmony between Buddhism and Christianity, and seeks a Christian parallel to *anattā*:

The selfless person is the one who lives in harmony with oneself, the others and the environment by the spirit of non-greed (*araga*), non-hatred (*adosa*), and non-delusion (*amoha*). ...The Christian peace or harmony (*shalom*) is the tranquil state with God, others, himself, and the world.⁶⁴

He points to the importance of understanding personhood in each context:

Genuine dialogue of Christian morality and Buddhist ethics is based on the anthropological implications of faith in each paradigm. They are the fundamental concepts in the meaning of person as interpreted in each of their own cultural contexts. They provide guideposts and serve as directional signals. They do not solve problems; rather they help set up the problems correctly.⁶⁵

Lertjitlekka asserts the benefits of dialogue:

In spite of the many challenges, dialogue provides for moral progress and mutual understanding of each partner. This in turn brings self-understanding and self-correction of each one in their own faith. ... A more detailed investigation from both partners is still needed. Dialogue and life always go forward – together.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Lertjitlekka (1998), 382.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 383.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 383.

6.7 'Meekness'

Mejudhon made extensive use of Suntaree Komin's work, 'Psychology of the Thai People',⁶⁷ to try to understand why Christian witness in Thailand had been so unsuccessful, 'Even after 165 years of aggressive evangelism, professing Christians still numbered only 0.6 percent in 1980'.⁶⁸ Mejudhon studied missionary strategies from the nineteenth century to the present and found that success followed culturally appropriate methods of witnessing:

I believe that the Christian church in Thailand is viewed as having violated the cultural and religious values of reciprocity and harmony by its use of aggressive methods and is now deprived of the opportunity to initiate dialogue about the gospel.⁶⁹

When speaking of reactions to the verbal presentation of the gospel he found that missionaries and Thai Christians were seen by Buddhists as 'those who violate Thai cultural values.'⁷⁰

Missionaries' attitudes towards Buddhism, the predominant religion in Thailand, have often been negative, and some consider Buddhism evil. In the nineteenth century, Siam was the only country in Asia which succeeded in fully maintaining its political independence from aggressive Western powers. Historically, Thailand also has successfully maintained its spiritual independence in spite of aggressive, Western missionary strategies by simply using the cultural and religious behaviour pattern of meekness as a shield to escape spiritual colonization.⁷¹

Mejudhon looked for a complete change in attitude on the part of Christians. He challenged missionaries to 'find out the goodness' in Buddhism,⁷² to find 'contact points in Thai culture and religious value.' and 'study Buddhism in its pure form and in its

⁶⁷ Komin (1991).

⁶⁸ Mejudhon (1997), 1.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 2 -3.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 258.

⁷¹ Ibid., 2.

⁷² Ibid., 262.

popular expressions and recognize the impact it has on Thai everyday life and culture'.⁷³

This shows his discernment of Thai Buddhism. Christians and missionaries who do not study Thai culture and Buddhism will be frustrated in their Christian witness. The other attitude change he urged was for Christians to present themselves in humility, with meekness, not pride.⁷⁴

Biblical meekness involves entering into people's worlds – their thought world, their heart-world, and the world of their social reality, as Christ entered our world to reach us and draw us closer to himself and to one another.⁷⁵

This is an essential preliminary if we are to dialogue for:

The dialogical approach seeks to relate to others as neighbours and equals, regarding their beliefs as worthy of serious consideration and making an earnest effort to comprehend and appreciate them.⁷⁶

Meekness is the antithesis of aggression. But in the past missionaries, possibly without realizing it, have been aggressive in the Thai context:

A hidden agenda used in developing a relationship, or material goals used as a means to manipulate a relationship are considered aggressive.⁷⁷

In dialogue we must know with whom we are speaking. There are nine key Thai characteristics the person who would hold a dialogue with Thais should understand.⁷⁸

⁷³ Mejudhon (1997), 240.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 404-405.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 12.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 6.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 98.

⁷⁸ The **first** is the **ego orientation** – the values of face-saving, criticism-avoidance, and consideration (เกรงใจ). The Thai has a deep sense of independence, pride and dignity and must save face at all costs, to be made to 'lose face' is the deepest humiliation. The **second** is the **grateful relationship orientation**. Gratefulness (บุญคุณ) is expressed in the concept of *katanyu*. The **third** is the **smooth interpersonal relationship orientation** which is characterized by the preference for a non-assertive, polite, and humble personality which accounts for the smiling, friendly attitude of the Thai people that fascinates most foreign visitors. The **fourth** orientation is **flexibility and adjustment**. This means that the group and the situation rather than the principle, ideology or system will guide conduct. This is very frustrating for 'decision making' – as the decision may easily be changed. The **fifth** is the **religio-psychical orientation** – the Thai in general are this-worldly, and not many are interested in *nibbāna*. Religion is felt emotionally and not rationalized cognitively. The **Sixth** is **education and competence**

Understanding these characteristics is particularly significant for Buddhist-Christian dialogue. These values, rather different from western ones, seem closer to Biblical ones with their emphasis on relationships. They must be borne in mind as we pursue dialogue.

6.8 Summary

The survey shows that Thai Christians, with the exception of a few researchers, have largely neglected any need for dialogue. It shows that from the 1970's the problem of religious language was appreciated at least by one Pastor, Petchsongkram, and one scholar, Phongphit. This problem will never disappear but we should be aware of it and attempt to mitigate its effects. In order to communicate the Christian message effectively, Pongudom highlights the need to understand Buddhism. David Burnett, a western scholar, is of the same opinion:

Only as Christians understand the fascination of this unique religion will they be able to communicate meaningfully with those of the Buddhist tradition.⁷⁹

Pongudom's finding is confirmed by Suwanbubbha who links both religion and culture as necessary objects of study if a new religion is to be introduced, hence the necessity and urgency of dialogue. Lorgunpai makes an effort to hold a dialogue through his study of Ecclesiastes and Lertjitlekka does so in his comparative study of Buddhist and Christian ethics and morality. Mejudhon breaks new ground in his analysis of

oriented. Knowledge is not sought for its own sake but for its value in climbing the social ladder. The interdependence orientation is seventh. The eighth is 'Fun and Pleasure'. This is expressed in Thai vocabulary. The word for work is *ngan* (งาน); for party it is also *ngan*, wedding party is *ngandaengngan* (งานแต่งงาน), Christmas party is *ngankrismas* (งานคริสต์มาส). Work is done in community and should be fun (*sanuk* สนุก). The ninth, achievement-task orientation, is last in importance. All Thais, without exception, ranked the achievement value much lower than the group of social relationship values. (from Komin (1991), 132-213). See also Klausner (1987), 245-250, 280-282.

⁷⁹ Burnett (1996), 8.

missionary strategies vis-à-vis the psychology of Thai people. He considers meekness to be the appropriate stance for Thai Christians in making Christianity more conformable to the Thai worldview.

Chapter Seven: Thai Christians' views on dialogue and how their understanding of the Kingdom of God impacts dialogue

In the search for a Thai Christian understanding of the kingdom of God and views on dialogue, no literature written by Thais has been found. There is, of course, a large amount of literature written by western scholars on the kingdom of God and on dialogue.¹ So for this thesis, it was necessary to seek the opinions of the Thai Christian leaders on the goal of life, the kingdom of God/ heaven, eternal life and their views on dialogue, in particular Christian–Buddhist dialogue, its value and importance.² The Thai Christian leaders' responses reveal how their perceptions influence both their attitudes to their faith and the way forward for dialogue.³

7.1 Thai Christians' views on dialogue

Nearly all⁴ of the respondents thought Christians should dialogue with Buddhists.⁵ All of those who disagreed gave reasons indicating that they had a negative view of dialogue, or that they did not really understand the meaning of dialogue,⁶ possibly seeing it in terms of a confrontational debate. Thai Christian leaders perceive that they should study Buddhism. The main reasons given for studying Buddhism were: a) to better understand

¹ There is none written by western scholars on the Thai Christians' view of the kingdom of God or on dialogue.

² See appendix five for the questions asked, respondent profile and tabled responses.

³ See appendix six for Thai Christian understanding of the kingdom of God.

⁴ Twenty five respondents thought Christians should dialogue with Buddhists, whereas only five thought they should not. One respondent did not answer this question. Two said should or should not depending on the objective of the dialogue.

⁵ Expressed and gave reasons to support their view as: To develop mutual understanding, for better knowing self and knowing the other, to deepen friendship and hence easier to bring them to Christ; Dialogue is the first step that leads to the preaching of the good news.

⁶ Reasons against dialogue were: dialogue can lead to discord or disunity, misunderstanding, arguments, conflicts and ending in a fight; unhealthy comparison between religions; one wanting to beat the other, one better than the other. One said dialogue has nothing to do with preaching the gospel.

their fellow Thais and thus be better able to communicate the gospel⁷, and b) for mutual understanding so as to enable people with different beliefs to live together in peace.

Although none perceived the study of Buddhism and dialogue with Buddhists to be a waste of time, about half of them rated it as unimportant, the other half split between important and most important.⁸ All respondents rated evangelism as being most important or important.⁹ When asked to place seven items in order of importance, almost all of them gave evangelism the highest priority; 'the study of Buddhism' and 'dialogue with Buddhists' were given the lowest priority with 'social problems', 'politics', 'environmental concern', and 'social justice' coming in between.

The questionnaire and its responses have thrown into relief a cardinal point. There is a vital double link underpinning the success or failure of evangelism in the Thai context. Firstly, to be able to dialogue fruitfully with Buddhists, it is necessary to know Buddhism. Secondly, to evangelise successfully in the Thai context, it is necessary to dialogue with Buddhists. If the majority of the Thai Christian leaders had understood these connections, 'the study of Buddhism' and 'dialogue with Buddhists' would have been rated with priorities comparable to 'evangelism'. Moreover, half of the respondents would not have rated 'study Buddhism' and 'dialogue with Buddhists' unimportant, but would have valued them as highly as 'evangelism'.¹⁰ Without dialoguing with Buddhists, Thai Christians will not be able to find ways of communicating Christianity to Thai Buddhists in ways that are comprehensible for them. The responses highlighted this lack

⁷ Expressed as: so that one can communicate to Buddhists in terms that they can understand and thus be able to witness effectively to them; not for sake of religious study, but for understanding the thoughts of Thai and thus be able to convey the gospel in the right way to Thai; When we understand their worldview, we then will be able to explain the gospel comprehensibly; to find common grounds so one can use them as bridges to convey the Christian gospel.

⁸ Three respondents perceived dialogue with Buddhists to be somewhat time wasting. See appendix 5.3 A.

⁹ Only three rated important, the rest rated as most important. See appendix 5.3 A

¹⁰ See appendix 5.3 for tabled responses.

of understanding and their inadequacy of communication. The majority used purely Christian terms and jargon. For a non-Christian with a Buddhist worldview, their explanation of the Christian goal in life, the kingdom of God and everlasting life, is likely to be misunderstood, even incomprehensible. The same Thai word may have very different connotations since the understanding of it depends on the background of the hearer:

*Effective communication can only be determined by how the Receptor perceives and understands the message, not how accurately the Communicator thinks he has delivered it. This presupposes a comprehensive understanding of the Receptor's world view and perceptions.*¹¹

Bridge-building requires intelligible dialogue so the need is to develop points of contact and clarify words and terminology for communication so that each can understand the other's concept accurately. Hardly any of the respondents answered in terms that would allow a Buddhist to find common ground. Explanations to clarify each of the Christian terms are necessary. Of the eleven questions posed only three had responses which could be more meaningful to Buddhists. The **first question** was, 'If the ultimate goal in life for a Buddhist is to enter *nibbāna*, what do you think is the ultimate goal in life for a Christian?' Only three respondents used more Buddhist-familiar terminology.

One wrote:

Nibbāna is extinction (ดับสูญ) and emptiness (ว่างเปล่า) or all things are completely gone. It is opposite to Christian belief. The spirit (จิตวิญญาณ) never dies. The choice is heaven or hell. If Buddhists think that heaven is lower than *nibbāna* that is alright it is their belief. One needs to look at the background philosophy and the teachings of what the Buddha was communicating. But Christians hope in eternal life to be with God for eternity.¹²

Another wrote:

¹¹ Davis, J.R. (1993), 11.

¹² Rev. Dr. Manoch Jangmook (Director of Bangkok Bible College and Seminary) answer to question three.

The goal for Buddhists is *nibbāna*, which means extinction, not having to be born, it is vacuum (สูญญากาศ). The goal for Christians is eternal life, which has existence, not disappeared but exists as spirit that is *amata* (อมตะ).¹³

The third wrote:

Nibbāna is to quench *kilesa* and *dukkha*. It emphasises the general characteristics of all *sarikhāra* (สังขาร) which is *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā*. It holds on to the theory of birth and the cycle of life. Those with this understanding will say that there is no God. But Christians believe that there is a creator God, Jesus Christ is God the Son who is our Redeemer and the Holy Spirit who is our helper and teacher. Christians believe in heaven and hell as is described in the Bible. We believe in the Triune God. The ultimate goal in life is to receive salvation and have eternal life ready to enter heaven as promised in the Bible. It will not be extinction. Human beings cannot rescue themselves from sin but need to be rescued by the redeeming act of Jesus Christ on the cross.¹⁴

The **second question**, 'Could you give me a definition of 'eternal life'? Please explain the meaning of 'eternal life'', only three respondents referred to Buddhist ideas. One wrote:

Eternal life means perfect life, escape from the circle of life, birth and death. If I want to use Buddhist language it means reaching *nibbāna* that is no more suffering and freedom from troubles. This is the ultimate perfection, nothingness as well as fullness, encompassing everything. It is life in God, in other words salvation in terms of ultimate freedom.¹⁵

Another wrote:

Eternal life is life that is full of happiness according to what God the creator intended and had redeemed. It is life that has freedom (หลุดพ้น) escaped from birth, growing old, suffering, sickness, and death.¹⁶

The third wrote:

Eternal life is life that is lasting forever with no end. In the Bible it includes life that is with God in the kingdom of heaven forever. It is a life that has

¹³ Thongdam Thomproa (Moderator of the 16th district of the Church of Christ in Thailand and Deputy pastor of Srimongkhon church) answer to question three.

¹⁴ Elder Tawai Kittikoon (Chairman of the Chiengrai Protestant churches co-ordinating Committee and Moderator of the Chiengrai second church district of the Church of Christ in Thailand) answer to question three.

¹⁵ Rev. Dr. Pradit Takerngrangsarit's (Vice president of Payap University) answer to question ten.

¹⁶ Rev. Dr. Kamol Arayapruteep (retired) answer to question ten.

true happiness. A life that is glorified (สง่าราศี), Life that has power and is not to be born, grow old, get ill or die any more.¹⁷

To the **third question**, ‘What does ‘the Kingdom of God’ mean to you? Personally?’, only one answered in a way that gave a point of contact for Buddhists:

God created all things and gave human beings the freedom to rule his creation. But when human beings sin, this gives rise to suffering. Therefore Jesus came into the world to show the way and preach ... Those who believe in Jesus and do according to his teaching will be in the kingdom of God.¹⁸

Rev. Dr. Pradit Takerngrangsarit further highlighted this problem in his answer to the question, ‘How do you feel the Kingdom of God impacts or relates to the Thai society as a whole?’:

The problem is Thai society has no point of contact with this kind of thought or theology. If one wants to explain to non-Christians so they can understand, one will definitely need to use a different vocabulary or another way of explaining. The kingdom of God is an exclusive term, only understood among the Christians. If one uses it for the general public, one will not be able to communicate much. One will need to find words to communicate so others can understand.

He echoes Petchsongkram who said thirty-five years ago that, ‘The church in Thailand today absolutely must learn to give a reason for her faith in *intelligible and convincing* terms’.¹⁹ Thai Christians should be able to explain their faith to fellow Thais in ways that are comprehensible for them. St Paul also stressed this need for clarity in explaining the Christian message.²⁰ Jesus uses three terms at different points of the story to communicate his message: the kingdom of God, eternal life, and salvation.²¹ St Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, rarely uses the term ‘the kingdom of God’²² but uses other terms

¹⁷ Rev. Dr. Theera Janepiriyaprayoon (Chairman of the Thailand Evangelism and Church Growth Committee and Senior Pastor of Mahapawn Bangkok Church) answer to question ten.

¹⁸ Father Vira Arpondratana (Director of Catechetical Centre of Bangkok Archdiocese) answer to question five.

¹⁹ Petchsongkram (1975), 204.

²⁰ Colossians 4:3-4.

²¹ Mark 10: 17-31.

²² The kingdom of God is mentioned fourteen times in Paul’s letters to churches, though not at all in 2 Corinthians or Philippians.

such as 'citizenship' instead. If the kingdom of God is central to Jesus' teaching why then does Paul seldom use the term? This is because he adapts his usage to his context, and with a Gentile audience, did not use the 'Jewish kingdom' concept but 'citizenship' in relation to the Roman Empire.

The New Testament explains the mystery of the cross to different people in different ways. For example, with his Jewish audience the writer of Hebrews emphasised the high priesthood of Christ and the sacrificial system. At the cross God's son made purification for sins.²³ St. John, also Jewish, used the image of 'lamb of God'. God sent his Son to be 'the atoning sacrifice for our sins'.²⁴ St. Peter looked at the cross with the understanding of atoning sacrifice. Jesus was crucified like 'a lamb without defect or blemish'.²⁵ St Paul seemed to realize that the sacrificial language which was relevant for the Jews was less relevant for the non-Jews. He introduced both the idea of redemption and that of adopted sons to make the mystery of the cross understandable and relevant to the people of the Roman Empire. This was effective as a large proportion of the population were slaves. Thai Christians need to make the mystery of the cross relevant to Thai people where the language of atonement and sacrifice or redemption and that of the adopted son fails to communicate any relevant meaning.

The pastors considering dialogue 'not important' or 'time-wasting'²⁶ might possibly have perceived that 'dialogue with men of other faiths is a betrayal of mission and disobedience to the command to proclaim the gospel.'²⁷ However, Samartha's analysis of the theological support for dialogue should encourage them. Samartha first makes the point

²³ Hebrews 1:3.

²⁴ 1 John 4:10.

²⁵ 1 Peter 1:18-19.

²⁶ Eighteen out of thirty-three.

²⁷ Samartha (1980), 162.

that God is in relationship with men of all ages and faiths through Jesus Christ and so 'To be in dialogue is ... to be part of God's continuing work among us and our fellow men.' Secondly since the church is 'sign and symbol' of a community of reconciliation and forgiveness, a new creation, 'The freedom and love which Christ offers constrain us to be in fellowship with strangers so that all may become fellow citizens in the household of God.' Thirdly he points to Christ's promise that the Holy Spirit will lead us into truth, and says, 'dialogue becomes one of the means of the quest for truth.'²⁸

7.2 How the Thai Christians' understanding of the Kingdom of God impacts dialogue

The majority of Thai Christian leaders, thinking in terms of a spiritual kingdom, focused solely on the spiritual and ignored social and other concerns. They believed their task was evangelism but their answers revealed that they were not well equipped for evangelism. They faced pitfalls stemming from the problem of attitude - a superior rather than a humble attitude. Christianity in dialogue needs speakers with consideration, not condescension. The leaders' attitudes, left unchanged, will blight dialogue with people of a different worldview. The majority felt that social change could only come to society if a large proportion were Christian. They perceived that the kingdom of God relates to Thai society as a whole via evangelism²⁹ and does not have a direct social, political, economic, or environmental impact on the Thai society,³⁰ thus re-enforcing their aim to focus solely on the spiritual. They think that the more Thais become Christian the greater will be the

²⁸ Samartha (1980), 164.

²⁹ Expressed as: When the kingdom of God expands, there will then be a change - a transformation in the hearts and minds of the Thai people; If the Thai society accepts and is willing to be under God's rule, be part of the kingdom of God, Thai society will improve; Thai society will be lifted up by the kingdom of God, Thai society will end but the kingdom of God will expand to the end of the world; people who are in God's kingdom will be high quality members of the society and of the Thai nation.

³⁰ Expressed as: Thai society has nothing to do with this kind of thought or theology, about the kingdom of God; Very little impact. Thais do not know what God is and who God is; not much impact because there are very few Christians. Most Thai Christians are still under the influence of the world, thus their life is not different from those who do not know God.

impact on society. This may come from the perception that the kingdom is in essence a spiritual realm and that Christians, being only a small minority, cannot make any significant impact on society. As a result the emphasis is on evangelising rather than encouraging Christians to take leading roles to effect changes in the society.³¹ A small minority mentioned social concern as an aspect of the kingdom. One Catholic wrote that social work should be done out of love and not with the aim to convert. The Protestant respondents mentioned social concern with the aim to make disciples. This indicates that the Catholic leaders have learnt some lessons from past history³² but the Protestants have not learnt from the Catholics' experience. It also reflects the different theologies of grace of the two strands of Christianity, the Catholics having a theology of God's 'providential grace' whereas the Protestants are focussing on 'saving grace'.

The majority overlook Christ's likening the kingdom to seed, yeast and salt, where a little can go a long way. It is a matter of mobilising the small Christian minority in Thai society, the church, to be the visible heralds of the kingdom of God. The problem being:

Thai churches fail to voice out God's desires and God's standards to the issues the Thai people face. Evangelism in Thailand is in the western theological way rather than Thai contextualization. The Thai churches cannot impact the Thai society to show the distinction between those who submit to God's rule and those who do not. Our evangelism and even the teachings of the church separate faith and daily life, church life and social life.³³

Most of the leaders see the church as the agent of the kingdom of God. They believe that with conversions to Christianity, society will change. This does not take into account God's ability to work outside the church. Most Thai church leaders see the church as the centre for expansion of the kingdom whereas theologians such as Hans Küng, Moltmann

³¹ However, one (Tonglaw Wongkamchai) had the view that the kingdom of God directly impacts the Thai society in the sense that God is ultimately in control of all things which also include Thai society.

³² See chapter two.

³³ Rev Samuel Lee's answer to question eight.

or Pannenberg see the kingdom of God (or the Spirit of God) as being at work outside as well as within the church.³⁴ The fact that God is Lord of creation is known in Thai theological thinking but is not firmly asserted. God is understood as creator but the consequences of God as creator have not been worked out. From the Buddhist point of view where creation comes from is not a significant matter. The origin of the world is an *abyakata* question. The worldview surrounding Thai Christians is that creation is *anicca*, an idea that is also present in the Bible. Thus the majority of leaders' misperception of the origin and scope of the kingdom of God becomes more comprehensible.³⁵ In addition, only the minority of leaders had any notion of a living connection between church and state, any idea of the 'salt' and 'light' imperatives for Christians in their society.³⁶ A comment of concern from the majority was that a large proportion in the Christian community did not themselves understand the meaning of the kingdom of God.³⁷ All respondents perceived that the church, the community of believers, represents the kingdom of God on earth.

In the writer's understanding, the Church, the company of believers, is but a flawed visible expression of God's kingdom in the world today. The Church, in so far as Christ is present in its members, should present the kingdom to today's world. His understanding is close to Hans Küng who sees the church as the herald of the kingdom:

The Church is not the kingdom of God, but it looks towards the kingdom of God, waits for it, or rather makes a pilgrimage towards it and is its herald, proclaiming it to the world. ... Thus the Church may be termed the fellowship of aspirants to the kingdom of God. ... The meaning of the Church does not reside in itself, in what it is, but in what it is moving towards. It is the reign of God which the Church hopes for, bears witness to, proclaims. It is not the bringer or the bearer of the reign of God which is to come and is at the same time already present, but its voice, its

³⁴ Moltmann (1998), 167, 206-209; Pannenberg (2004), 19-20; Küng (1981), 92-93.

³⁵ That the kingdom of God began with Jesus Christ's incarnation, and that the kingdom of God is neither physical nor territorial but of the spiritual realm. See appendix six.

³⁶ Matthew 5: 13-16.

³⁷ Buddhadasa was also concerned by the majority Buddhists' lack of understanding of *nibbāna*.

announcer, its *herald*. God alone can bring his reign; the Church is devoted entirely to its service.³⁸

Moltmann sees the church as an imperfect society, one that is not yet imaging the kingdom of God.³⁹ He would only see the kingdom of God present in history if it fulfilled certain conditions – God’s rule manifested:

The rule of God is manifested through word and faith, obedience and fellowship, in potentialities grasped, and in free co-operation for the life of the world.⁴⁰

Pannenberg sees the church as a pointer to the future fulfilment of the kingdom of God:

The church is not yet the kingdom of God; it is a preceding sign of the future fellowship of humanity under God’s reign.⁴¹

The three ideas are close. Pannenberg and Moltmann remind Thai church leaders that God’s kingdom is not limited to the church and the spiritual but includes political, social and environmental concerns as well.⁴² Küng reminds us that expanding the church is not in fact expanding the kingdom. The church’s job is to herald and prepare people for the kingdom through ‘the selfless service of humanity’.⁴³

Another area of the kingdom’s concern which is lacking from the Thai responses is concern for God’s creation - the environment, the world we live in. Some possible reasons for this have previously been pointed out. Nevertheless, Thai Christians should emulate some of their radical Buddhist fellows in environmental concerns. In fact the radical Buddhists are emphasising the relevance of Buddhist teaching to social, political,

³⁸ Küng (1981), 95 – 96.

³⁹ Moltmann (1998), 167.

⁴⁰ Moltmann (1998), 192.

⁴¹ Pannenberg (2004), 31.

⁴² Pannenberg points to the fact that from the beginning God’s lordship of creation and so the presence of his kingdom is seen as foundational, God’s lordship over the world is thought of as present already. Pannenberg (2004), 528-529; Moltmann (1998), 164.

⁴³ Küng (1981), 99.

economic and environmental concerns.⁴⁴ Buddhādāsa's efforts to bring the *lokkuttaradhamma* back into mundane society, are bearing fruit. Thai Christians may be in danger of withdrawing from the mundane into the spiritual, or as Buddhists would say the *lokuttara* realm.

Together with the state and radical Buddhists, the majority of pastors saw the danger to society of the prevalent reliance on *saiyasart*. Thai pastors, however, see this as Thai society being under the influence of darkness, materialism, corruption – the power of this world.⁴⁵ They wish to guide people to the kingdom of God to find peace, love and safety. Christians know the way and should be the light of the world. If enough people were converted, things would improve. However, a minority of respondents did say Christians should understand more about the problems in society and give more attention to them. One said, 'We should realize that Thai society is under God's rule also.' The majority of respondents' social concern, however, was limited to concern for the Christian community. Pastors of this view should seriously consider Moltmann's warning:

But in the age of the growing interdependence of all the peoples and societies on earth, limitation to one's own society or to 'Christendom' becomes more and more provincial.⁴⁶

The church should accept his challenge:

For Christianity's hope is not directed towards another world, but towards the world as it is changed in the kingdom of God. ... The church does not understand itself if it does not understand its mission in this world process and its hope for this world process.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ See chapter one e.g. several of Sulak Sivaraksa's foundations & organisations.

⁴⁵ Expressed as: Because Thai people do not know the kingdom of God, Thai society is under the power of Satan. As a result the Thai society is in darkness, in rebellion to God, evil increases; the kingdom of God is the channel or method that God uses to change this wicked society.

⁴⁶ Moltmann (1998), 164.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 164.

It seems possible to trace similar patterns in Buddhist and Christian mission. Buddhādāsa began his work by teaching about 'no I/me-my/mine' in order to reach *nibbāna*, not only after death but in the here-and-now. Then Buddhādāsa moved on to teaching *dhamma* socialism - the Buddhist's responsibility to society. Christians, having been called to the kingdom, need to be sent out into the world to leaven society. Some Christian leaders have grasped that once one accepts Christ as Saviour, enters the kingdom of God and becomes part of it, one should then take responsibility for others. It must be stressed that to witness to one's faith is but a part of social concern.

7.3 Summary

Thai Christians should recognise that the kingdom of God covers the here-and-now, the *lokiya* world, and not just the spiritual realm or life after death. For God to reign in the here-and-now means that Christians need to be involved in social, political, economic and environmental concerns. By being involved, they will automatically be in dialogue with others through their daily lives. They can demonstrate the fact that they are living in the kingdom of God in the here-and-now and are not just merely waiting for life after death. Like the majority state and folk Buddhists, who consider *nibbāna* to be relevant only beyond death, most Christian leaders consider the goal of Christian life - the kingdom of God - to be only spiritual and relevant beyond death. A minority are, with Buddhādāsa and Payutto, finding relevance in the here-and-now. For Buddhists the relevance is *nibbāna*, for Christians it is the kingdom of God.

The implications of the kingdom of God are immense for the way Christians live every day of their earthly life. So as not to live their lives far short of their possibilities and calling, they should not only strive for a better understanding of the kingdom of God but

also for better ways of working it out in practice - for grace to be better citizens. All the ramifications of the Christian doctrines mentioned in this chapter are beyond the scope of this thesis. We have seen that the Christian goal of the kingdom of God is very different from the Buddhist goal, *nibbāna*. Nevertheless there are points of contact where we can learn something from each other.

Chapter Eight: Thai Christian response to Buddhism and how it might be enlarged

A Christian response to Buddhism can be developed more effectively after realizing how Buddhists comprehend Christianity. How Thai Buddhists perceive Christianity is best learnt from Buddhādāsa, the only Thai *bhikkhu* to-date to attempt to dialogue with Christians. Some key concepts needing clarification are: God, love, sin, and self. Each topic is broad and complex, but all present vital possibilities for developing the Thai Christian response to Buddhism. Areas needing further research will be indicated but it is not possible here to treat each in depth or provide solutions. It is to be hoped that other scholars, especially those who know both religions and are well versed in Thai, Pali, Greek and Hebrew, will join in the task of building bridges between Buddhism and Christianity. To conclude the chapter, dialogue is considered as the responsibility to society of both Buddhists and Christians.

8.1 Buddhādāsa's perception of Christianity

Buddhādāsa spoke on several occasions to the effect that ultimately all religions are the same, and should be considered on an equal footing¹:

The true and real religion is the truth that exists naturally, the truth that is not invented by anyone, the truth of nature. This truth in general is the same for all religions. When one does the ultimate good, one will enter or achieve a state of eternal happiness; a state that is permanent called *nibbāna*, God, *Paramattaman* (ปรมัตถ์), heaven (สวรรค์), the ultimate goal of religion, whatever one calls it. We should realize that there is only one religion, the religion of truth, or the religion of the truth of nature. When one acts appropriately, one will find the ultimate happiness that never changes.²

Buddhādāsa, however, subtly implied that Buddhism was superior to all. This can be inferred from several of his works, many of which are not yet translated into English. A

¹ See chapter four footnotes 184, 186, 187, 190.

² Buddhādāsa (1999a), 10-11.

striking example comes from '*Anattā of the Buddha*', in which he compared belief in *attā* and *anattā* :

Those who hold onto a god have to surrender to that god. Believers are not to argue. It is rather oppressive, allowing neither freedom for actions nor thoughts. Everything has to be according to the will of the god. This is considered the lowest form of *attā* belief suitable for the uneducated, those whose thoughts are still those of a child.

One learns to release oneself from the restrictions, reaching the stage of having *attā* for self. One does things for self, no longer needing to depend on a god, whereas a child needs to hold onto one. One learns to believe in one's own *kamma*. One is not restricted by a god who allows us to do *kamma* in only one life and all the *kamma* one did will be written down for us to hear the verdict on the Day of Judgment. This second level of *attā* belief is slightly higher and gives more freedom. It also gives the hope that the *attā* that has performed the good, pure and right deeds will ultimately achieve the supreme unchangeable happiness. However, this level, of having *attā* for self and not *attā* that belongs to god, is still not the ultimate freedom. One is still imprisoned by and in oneself, in the prison of holding onto oneself, carrying oneself, and infatuated in oneself, without realizing that one is burning oneself in the fire of feeling of self: self satisfaction, love of self and like of self. For a Buddhist, this level is not the ultimate end of suffering.³

Illustrating his point that *anattā* is better, Buddhādāsa told this parable:

A man found plenty of delicious fruit in the forest. He carried as much as he possibly could without feeling the weight. After walking for some time, tiredness crept in, the feeling of delight died down, the weight he was carrying gradually felt heavier and heavier. Little by little he forwent the fruit only keeping a few of the very best. As he journeyed on, he became weak and wearied; he ate some fruit and threw some away until there was none left. Even with nothing to carry but himself, he was so exhausted, he wanted to lie down. Suddenly he saw a gold mine. He ran and took much gold, heavier than the fruit he had begun with. One cannot tell where his energy came from, but soon the weight was too much to bear, he hid the gold along the way until he had hardly any left - only the slightest amount that a weary person could carry. As he journeyed on home, he discovered priceless jewels. Another surge of energy took hold of him and he carried as many jewels as he could, the weight of which exceeded that of the gold. Now he was very tired. Not paying attention to where he was going and allowing his imagination to run wild with such a fortune he had stumbled onto, he got lost. He gradually threw the jewels away as the weight was too much for him. He felt relieved when, despite its weight being of no consequence to his journeying on, he threw away the last most precious and priceless jewel. He could have easily carried his last jewel but decided not to because he was unable to prevent it from

³ Buddhādāsa (1999a), 133-134.

pressing on his heart. Extreme happiness and peace seeped in. His heart felt no burden. Nothing could make his heart speed up its beat, pound or burn. He could then breathe easily and felt cooled and calm.⁴

Buddhadāsa concluded that as long as one is holding onto *attā*, one will continue to carry the weight of self. The people holding onto *attā* feel content with the kind of happiness that requires them to bear the weight of their *attā*. They stop there and cannot see, nor are able to understand, the benefit of taking a further step to *anattā*. They claim that they already have the ultimate happiness and do not realize that they are still carrying their *attā*. They are attached to *attā*'s benefits without realizing it. When one no longer holds onto *tuagoo-khonggoo* but sees self as *anattā*, one lets go of *attā*, achieving *suññatā* or *jītwang*.⁵ One has the freedom of *nibbāna*, the unchangeable, moving from the *lokiya* to the *lokuttara* realm, the end of *dukkha*.⁶ Those who hold on to *attā* believe that after death their *attā* will be happy. When questioned whether they know that *attā*, or the world or realm that the *attā* will go to, the God who beckons or guarantees their happiness, they are unable to answer or confirm the reality that they believe in.⁷ Thus Buddhadāsa implies the superiority of Buddhism over a theistic belief and described those who believed in a deity and heaven in the following way:

Let us consider human selfishness. They even claim and use sacred things, or the deity, for their own selfish benefits. They worship, pray to the sacred beings, and act accordingly, in order to get what they want. If no benefits are granted, then they no longer see the object of worship as sacred... The deity, the sacred objects, are to help me, to benefit me. Humans make merit so they can go to heaven. Is this not for a self, or is it really for the sake of *dhamma*?⁸

Those who do not know the truth will continue being infatuated with heaven. They aim to get to heaven, where they can get what they want, a city where there is supreme happiness, the eternal heaven of other religions. Heaven is used as bait for people to do good. People, therefore, become uninterested in ending *dukkha* in the here-and-now. Ending *dukkha* in the here-and-now is the real goal of Buddhism. Heaven is the first fundamental

⁴ Buddhadāsa (1999a), 134-136.

⁵ Ibid., 181.

⁶ Ibid., 206-209.

⁷ Ibid., 79-81.

⁸ Ibid., 157-159.

problem distracting people from achieving the ultimate goal of Buddhism. They are concentrating on their *taṇhā* and *upādāna*. We need to teach the people that the heaven they aspire to is merely a way of expressing a goal in terms of *puggaladhiṭṭhāna*. It is suitable for those without the wisdom to grasp the real meaning. For some, even *nibbāna*, which is the end of *dukkha*, becomes a city of deathlessness, or a city where there is supreme happiness that a human or even a *devatā* can experience. To express the goal in such a way is *puggaladhiṭṭhāna*.

Buddhism solves the problem of how we are to live in this world without *dukkha*. We have to exist in *dukkha* without being *dukkha*, in other words, to be in the fire but yet remain cool. Buddhism gets rid of *dukkha* in the here-and-now. It does not aim to take one to heaven. Nobody knows where heaven is or whether it really exists. Buddhism's aim is not to get to heaven after death, or even after future lives. Whether heaven is real or not real, nobody can prove.⁹

To end *dukkha* in the here-and-now is better than to believe in deity and heaven. Buddhādāsa appears to think that the Christian teaching of the kingdom of God, can be perceived as happiness associated with an *attā* entering the kingdom of God. The happiness or supreme bliss of an *attā* is of a lower level than the enlightened person's release and bliss in the *lokuttara*, *nibbāna*. God is but our own creation:

We first need to have the correct understanding of troubles. They come not because god is punishing us. The troubles we face are from and of our own creation, stemming from holding onto *tuagoo-khonggoo*. When humans face more and more troubles, they find various ways of overcoming their troubles. They discover various principles, establish various rites, hypotheses, and even faith in a god so people can believe and hold onto him. It is only when true wisdom or the correct understanding is arrived at, that the true god will be manifested. Hence, everybody should see and realise for themselves that it is actually we ourselves who created god.¹⁰

Buddhism has a superior principle:

Buddhism eliminates *dukkha* which stems from holding onto I/me-my/mine. Buddhism provides practical steps for a person to follow without having to depend on external factors like god or any other powerful beings. There is no need to directly contradict anybody about god, hell, or heaven. Let them believe according to what they want to believe. Even if we need to relate to these topics, it is merely to help those without wisdom, those with such beliefs, so they can do good and abstain from the bad. They are unable to completely eliminate *tuagoo-khonggoo*. Even if they are able to abstain

⁹ Buddhādāsa (1999i), 19-21.

¹⁰ Ibid., 19-21.

from doing any bad and do only good, go to heaven and have happiness, they are still not free from the burden, and crushing oppression¹¹ of what is called *tuagoo-khonggoo*. Therefore they need a better and higher principle which will be able to completely eliminate the power of what is known as *attā*; a principle that can be used by not just humans in the here-and-now but among the *devatā* as well.¹²

Buddhists will not rely on a god, as god will become something to hold onto which is another kind of *tuagoo-khonggoo*:

We need not hope for mercy from god because the more one hopes in god, the more one is led astray from what can really eliminate *dukkha*. In fact, to be without *tuagoo-khonggoo*, is the true Buddha, the true *dhamma* and the true *sangha* or the true god that truly can be depended upon. Otherwise it is just the outer covering of god, Buddha, *dhamma* or *sangha* which itself can become the basis of something to hold onto in such a way that will eventually develop new, different and unique kinds of *tuagoo-khonggoo*. ... When we can eliminate *tuagoo-khonggoo*, we will reach *nibbāna* which is the end of all *dukkha*.¹³

Christians hope in the future kingdom. Hope to a Buddhist, however, is perceived negatively. In fact it is a basis of *taṇhā* which causes the holding onto *tuagoo-khonggoo*¹⁴:

Taṇhā has its basis from the six feelings (อารมณ์) from eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind. These feelings from the six sense impressions not only include the present immediate feelings. Feelings from the past can form the basis of *taṇhā* in the present, by dwelling on the past. Feelings to be realised in the future, known as hope, also form a basis of *taṇhā*. A more complicated problem because we can hope unfathomably and endlessly.¹⁵

We can gauge the general perception of Christianity that was held by Buddhādāsa and conclude that he perceived Christianity to be a less developed religion. Christians should not feel provoked but instead ask themselves why Buddhists have such a perception. What are the causes, and where does the misunderstanding lie? What have Christians been communicating or failing to communicate that leads Buddhists to have such a view? Phongphit is of the following opinion:

¹¹ มืดมน

¹² Buddhādāsa (1999i), 19-21.

¹³ Ibid., 48-51.

¹⁴ Ibid., 19-21.

¹⁵ Ibid., 66-71.

One may argue that what Buddhadasa Bhikkhu considers as Christianity in his writings is a mere caricature of it. Yet it must be admitted that such a caricature has been made possible also because some Christians have projected this kind of image. Another fact for many misunderstandings from the part of Buddhism is that there are few writings concerned with Christianity available in the language of the country. A Buddhist approach to Christianity is possible mainly through the reading of the Bible. Thus, the general view of the Buddhists towards the Christians is understandable.¹⁶

Thai Christians need to look again at how key Christian doctrines are being communicated. Christians can learn from Buddhādāsa who strove to make Buddhism understandable to his fellow Thais:

There is a great need to adapt words to express Buddhist ideas and doctrine so that they will be comprehensible to the general public. However, the key contents and messages have to be exactly the same as those found in the *tipiṭaka*. Great care has to be taken that all key doctrines are complete and accurate and all Buddhist principles are harmoniously presented. Not only has the work to be acceptable to Buddhist scholars, but also easy to understand for those Buddhists who are not that well educated. Importantly, it should be practical and not requiring one to undergo extensive and complicated study. The elderly or those who are ill and dying, who do not have time, should be given the chance to hear it and comprehend the *dhamma* straight away and in time before it is too late.¹⁷

Thai Christians should do for Christian teaching what Buddhādāsa has done for Buddhist teaching. To make Christianity comprehensible to their Buddhist friends will require great acumen as the Christian ideas and concepts are so foreign and so very different to Thai Buddhist ideas.

8.2 Clarifying some Christian teachings.

Key Christian words and doctrines are generally expressed by Christians in terms that are incomprehensible to Buddhists:

Words such as God, sin, love, and salvation, produce different meanings in the minds of the Thai. ...Buddhists are not interested in the concept of God, hell, heaven, resurrection, and forgiveness of sin. They do not have those

¹⁶ Phongphit (1978), 45-46.

¹⁷ Buddhādāsa (1999i), 42-43.

concepts in their minds. If they have such a concept, it seems to be different from the Bible and too removed from their experience for them to understand.¹⁸

An in-depth understanding of Buddhism will help Christians to appreciate why this is so.

The following are examples of such words:

* God, to a Buddhist, can mean several things.¹⁹ The most common understanding is that 'god' means one of the many deities who occupy different heavenly realms.

* Self, to a Christian, is created in the image of God, intended to have a relationship with the creator God. But to a Buddhist, it is but the *benjakhandā*, a self that is *anattā*. Realizing that one is *anattā* gives freedom from *dukkha* via non-attachment, but Christians teach to love – love God and love others as we love self. To a Buddhist this sounds like a *lokiya* teaching, of attachment.

* The goal for Buddhists is to reach *nibbāna*, for Christians it is to realize the kingdom of God in their lives. This can be perceived by Buddhists as a self doing things for the benefit of self – for self to reach heaven and be with God.

* Heaven and Hell to most Buddhists,²⁰ it is hierarchical heavenly and hellish realms where beings are rewarded for their good deeds and punished for their bad deeds respectively. But for Christians Heaven and Hell means the kingdom of God and eternal separation from God respectively.²¹

¹⁸ Mejudhon (1997), 92, 348.

¹⁹ See Davis, J.R. (1993), 10.

²⁰ Not the radical Buddhists like Buddhādāsa but for the State or Folk Buddhists.

²¹ There are several views held among Christians about Heaven and Hell. See Crockett (1996), Travis (1980), Küng (1984), Stott & Edwards (1988), Wright (2006). N. T Wright's view of heaven and hell, and New Heaven - New Earth seems to have the best potential for use in the Buddhist context. Referring first to another prevalent view, Wright expresses his view as follows:

The point seems to be that there is something called 'eternity', which is regularly spoken of as though it has only the loosest of connections with space and time, and one day we are going to step into this eternal existence, whether in the form of heaven or of hell, which has almost nothing to do with this earth and this present history. I suggest that this view, widely held

* Freedom which the Buddhist seeks is *vimutti* from *dukkha*, but a Christian seeks freedom from the bondage or power of sin.

* Sin, to a Christian means disobedience to God – to fall short of God's standards. But to a Buddhist, there is no such concept. There are bad deeds - that is black *kamma*.

* For a Buddhist, the reality of existence in this world is *tilakkhaṇa*. For a Christian, the reality of worldly existence is that one lives in a creation sustained by God.

With these differences it is not surprising that Buddhādāsa held the view of Christianity that he did. Four key areas where significant progress can be made in the Buddhist-Christian dialogue are to be reviewed.

8.2.1 God the Holy Spirit.

Buddhādāsa made the point that the term 'Holy Spirit' is incomprehensible to Buddhists.²² Thai Protestants use '*phravinyanborisut*' while the Catholics use '*phrajit*'. *Phra* is a prefix indicating the respect or worship due.²³ *Vinyan*, in common usage, refers to soul, ghosts and spirits.²⁴ Payutto gave the meaning of *vinyan* as 'consciousness; act of consciousness'. He added, in Thai usage, **which is misleading**, *vinyan* means 'soul, spirit'.²⁵ In educated

though it is, is far less warranted by the New Testament than would normally be supposed; that it can be at the very least seriously misleading, and at worst quite positively damaging to a healthy Christian faith; and that it should be challenged by a more biblical picture altogether. I suggest instead that what we find in the New Testament, and what I commend, is the Christian hope for a new, or renewed, heaven and a new, or renewed earth, with these two integrated together.

Wright (2006), 5

As for heaven Wright said:

'Heaven' in the Bible is not usually a reference to a future state, but to God's dimension of present reality, that dimension which is normally hidden from our gaze but where God's purposes are stored up.

Wright (2006), 7

See also Wright (2003), Wright (1994), chapters: ten - hell, eleven - Heaven and Power, and twelve - new Life New World.

²² See 4.5.1.3 God the Holy Spirit.

²³ It can also be a title of nobility; Thiengburanatham (1999), 914; The Official Thai Dictionary (1999), 762-764.

²⁴ Thiengburanatham (1999), 1257; The Official Thai Dictionary (1999), 1074.

²⁵ Payutto (2000c), 403.

Buddhist terminology *viññāṇa* is only one of the five *benjakhanda*.²⁶ From the Buddhist point of view, Christians make the Holy Spirit appear in common usage to inhabit a realm below that of humans, or in an educated Buddhist's terminology be less than a being.

Borisut can be translated 'pure, innocent, faultless, flawless, chaste, blameless, clean, virgin, unadulterated, sincere'²⁷ but there is no direct Thai word for 'holy'.²⁸ The nearest is *saksit* (ศักดิ์สิทธิ์) meaning 'sacred, holy, endowed with supernatural power, effective, efficacious'²⁹. Payutto gave the meaning of *saksit* as 'magic power, powerful to make things happen accordingly'³⁰ and *borisut* as 'clean, without impurity, pure'.³¹ So literally the Protestants' *phravinyanborisut* is 'a spirit without impurity to be worshipped'. The Catholic *phrajit* is as unacceptable as *phravinyanborisut* since in common language *jī* (*citta*) means 'mind, thought, or heart'³². Thus Christians are seen to make *phrajit* or *phravinyanborisut* less than a being.

A scholar of New Testament Greek, Pali, and Thai and one who knows both Buddhism and Christianity is needed to work out a more appropriate appellation for the Holy Spirit: Comforter, Enabler, Advocate and Strengthener. Buddhādāsa suggested the use of *niyyānika-dhamma* (นิยยานิกธรรม), but gave no explanation of why he thought it was appropriate.³³ *Niyyānika* means 'vehicle or means to bring out of the heap of suffering'.³⁴ This does appear suitable for the Holy Spirit's role as guide and strengthener.

²⁶ Constituents of existence.

²⁷ Thiengburanatham (1999), 736; The Official Thai Dictionary (1999), 609.

²⁸ 'Holy' is translated as 'ที่ควรเคารพสักการะ (To be respected and worshipped)'; Sethaputra (2002), 345.

²⁹ Thiengburanatham (1999), 1288; The Official Thai Dictionary (1999), 1094.

³⁰ Payutto (2000e), 290, not found in Payutto. (2000d).

³¹ Payutto (2000d), 134.

³² Thiengburanatham (1999), 335; The Official Thai Dictionary (1999), 312.

³³ Buddhādāsa (1999c), 156.

³⁴ Payutto (2000d), 127.

8.2.2 Love

Kwamrak (ความรัก love) has a negative connotation to a Buddhist. Love is an emotion leading one into trouble, which ultimately is suffering. Other words more acceptable to Buddhists should be explored for use in place of *kwamrak*, which was directly adopted from western Christians. One possible alternative is *katanyu* which may simply be translated ‘grateful’ but the meaning goes deeper than that simple English word.³⁵ It is used to describe one who is both thankful for benefits received and reciprocates them. *Katanyu* is a concept of eastern culture.³⁶ Because of *katanyu*, we see Asian children taking pride in caring for their parents who gave them life. For the Buddhists to have *katanyu* is to put the one who practices it in line for the highest blessing.³⁷

In the Thai Christian context, *katanyu* would be an appropriate response to knowing God: as God the Father who created us, as God the Son who saved us, and as God the Spirit who is our helper. In the context of Buddhist culture, ‘For God first loved us, so we love him in return.’ might be more comprehensible if *katanyu* replaces the words ‘love in return’. But *katanyu* does not fit the idea of God’s love for us.

Defining God as love³⁸ needs a great deal of explanation to make it comprehensible to Buddhists in terms of both ‘God’ and ‘love’. The two concepts are indubitably important Christian concepts. Perhaps in the context of God’s love for humankind, *mettākaruṇā*³⁹ is more appropriate than *kwamrak*.

³⁵ Reciprocity of kindness, particularly the value of being grateful is a highly valued characteristic trait in Thai society; Komin (1991), 139.

³⁶ Found in Chinese, Indian and Japanese societies.

³⁷ One of *maṅgala* 38 (มงคล 38); Payutto (2000d), 323.

³⁸ พระเจ้าเป็นความรัก.

³⁹ Part of *brahmavihāra* 4.

‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself’⁴⁰, poses the problem of being incomprehensible to Buddhists, as the requirement sounds very worldly. The person who is thus attached, is heading into deeper suffering, and hence will be tied to ‘eternal life’, the unending *saṃsāra* which to the Buddhist understanding is eternal life, but certainly not *nibbāna*. Transliterating agape to communicate the Christian concept of selfless-love might be an appropriate solution to be explored.⁴¹ To convey ‘God’ and ‘love’ in the many different contexts in which Christians use the words, is a crucial challenge to be tackled by someone who understands both Buddhism and Christianity.

8.2.3 Sin

Sin is a key concept for Christians. If there were no sin, the work of Christ on the cross would not be needed. Without the cross and resurrection, there is no Christianity. A definition of sin is: any thought or action that disobeys the revealed will of God. Sin for Christians is disobedience to God – falling short of God’s standards. The creation story illustrates that disobedience results in broken relationships; both God to person and person to God, as well as person to person, person to environment and person to self. Moreover the person, as illustrated by Adam and Eve, suffers from guilt.

The cross and resurrection is described by some as the heart of Christianity rather as the *paṭiccasamuppāda* is the heart of Buddhism. Two important terms which do not exist in the Buddhist worldview⁴², namely God and sin, are involved. If one were to present the Christian message to a Buddhist, it would be a complex and challenging task. Both terms need to be explained. St Paul said that to the Gentiles the cross was foolishness; to the Jews

⁴⁰ Luke 10:25-28.

⁴¹ See Swearer (2004), 24-26.

⁴² Buddhism has *dhamma*, *akusala* (i.e. unskillful actions) and shame - not guilt.

it was a stumbling block.⁴³ We may add that to most Buddhists it is both irrelevant and ‘nonsense’.⁴⁴

To communicate the Christian concept of sin, the Buddhist position must first be explored. Buddhism has no personal god to be disobeyed or offended and hence no sin. However, Buddhism has the concept of thoughts or actions being *akusala*, which is the opposite of *kusala*. When one studies the Buddhist set of words covered by *akusala* there is an amazing array since every skilful act has its unskilful counterpart.⁴⁵ An unskilful action is any action that does not keep one on the path to *nibbāna*. Any action that keeps one in the cycle of *paṭiccasamuppāda* – the becoming mode - is considered unskilful.

The law of *kamma* regulates what is skilful and what unskilful. Actions producing black *kamma*, *bad*, are not skilful. They are demeritorious, wrong or evil. Significantly, ‘good’ actions, those producing white *kamma*, *good*, may be considered not very skilful also since they too keep one in *samsāra*.⁴⁶ There are thus degrees of skilfulness in Buddhism, and not a sharp dichotomy of sinful and un-sinful. Unskilful actions are the negative of each of the *sammā* elements in the *ariya-aṭṭhaṅgika-magga* - hindering the development of *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā*.

⁴³ 1 Corinthians 1:23.

⁴⁴ Mejudhon acknowledges that Buddhists do not understand the concept of sin, and missionaries were unable to explain how they could help Buddhists to understand sin. He also made the point that while Christian missionaries placed forgiveness of sin as of first importance in religion (out of ten reasons) Thai Christians placed it as seven out of ten and Buddhists in the tenth and last place; Mejudhon (1997), 93-94.

⁴⁵ Buddhist terminology for the various infractions of skilful conduct is very detailed, for example:

- The *sīla* (ศีล - precepts, rules of morality or rules of training) starts from five, eight and ten moving onto 227 rules for monks. The breaking of any is called *dussīla* (ทุศีล - of bad conduct; void of morality; immoral) or *duccarita* (ทุจริต - bad conduct; wrong action).
- The ten unwholesome courses of action (*akusala-kammaṭṭhāna* อกุศลกรรมบท 10)
- The four *vipatti* (วิบัติ) - failures; falling away
- The three unwholesome thoughts (*akusalavittakā* – อกุศลจิต 3)
- *kilesa* (กิลเลศ) defilements; impurities; impairments which start at a series of ten proceeding to 336
- *taṇhā* (ตัณหา - craving) which start from three, rise to six, and then to 108

Payutto (2000d), 381, 279, 159, 99, 340

⁴⁶ It is not the black or the white but the neither black nor white *kamma* that enables one to reach *nibbāna*.

The question remains as to the best word Christians should use to convey the idea of sin. Historically they have chosen the word *bap*. Payutto, says that *bap* used for 'sin or sinful' is a misleading usage.⁴⁷ He gives no definition of 'sin', but evil is translated as *bap*; wicked as *bap* or *chua* (ชั่ว)⁴⁸ and 'vices of conduct' as *kammakilesa* (กรรมกิลเลส).⁴⁹

Sin and guilt are absent from Payutto's dictionary of Buddhism. However, there is an entry for shame as *hiri* (hiri) or *lachcha* (ลัชชา).⁵⁰ The word commonly used in a judgment is *pit* (ผิด guilty) or *maipit* (ไม่ผิด not guilty) or *samnukpit* (สำนึกผิด feeling guilty). *Pit* means wrong or mistaken.⁵¹ A word cannot be taken from one language and be expected to carry the same meaning in another language and, unsurprisingly, the Buddhist worldview is reflected in everyday Thai language. Thus there are many Thai words used for evil, bad or wrong deeds,⁵² none for 'sin'.

The complexity of communicating sin is not appreciated:

Missionaries found many Buddhists do not have a deep understanding of sin because they are only required not to break the five precepts in Buddhism.⁵³

This remark shows no realization of the connection between sin and belief in the deity for Christians which contrasts with the individual moral responsibility of a Buddhist.

⁴⁷ *Bap* as adjective means 'evil; bad; wicked; demeritorious'; Payutto (2000d), 387.

⁴⁸ Payutto (2000d), 442 ; However, Payutto gave no entry for *chua* (ชั่ว).

⁴⁹ Ibid., 441.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 439.

⁵¹ Thiengburanatham (1999), 879; The Official Thai Dictionary (1999), 734.

⁵² *Bap* means 'sin, vice, wickedness badness, offense'. Equivalent Thai words were given as *kwamchuarai* (ความชั่วร้าย) which means 'wickedness', *kwamchua* (ความชั่ว) means 'vice, depravity, blemish, wickedness, immorality', *kwampid* (ความผิด) means 'guilt, mistake, wrong, offence', *laew* (เลว) means 'inferior, bad, poor, evil, low, worthless, vulgar, contemptible'. *Khonlaew* (คนเลว) means 'bad person, evil person, contemptible person'. *chua* (ชั่ว) means 'bad, wicked, evil, vile, immoral, vicious, iniquity, period of time, cycle, duration'. *Chuacha* (ชั่วช้า) means 'vile, vicious, wicked, base, ill, atrocious, nefarious', and *chuacha laewsarm* (ชั่วช้าเลวทราม), *chuachasara laew* (ชั่วช้าสาเลว) has equivalent meanings. (Thiengburanatham (1999), 752, 241, 242; The Official Thai Dictionary (1999), 624, 356, 1033).

⁵³ Mejudhon (1997), 306.

How are Thai Christians to communicate sin? Which words should be used? *Bap* has been used but it does not accurately communicate what Christians mean. Christians first need to understand what *bap* means to a Buddhist, for whom it is the consequence of sin, or 'the acts of sin', but not 'sin' itself. *Bap* is the result of disobeying God, which manifests itself as evil, bad or wrong deeds, and thoughts, as a Buddhist might say *bap*, *akusala*, or *vipatti*. *Bap* is anything considered unethical and immoral, that hinders one from reaching *nibbāna*. D.T. Niles asserts:

We must also seek to distinguish between the acts of sin and sin itself. ...In the New Testament, the word *hamartema* is used for an act of sin, and *hamartia* for sin. When the same word is used for both, it causes confusions.⁵⁴

Yet again, Biblical and Buddhist scholars with the linguistic knowledge to work out a more appropriate appellation for sin in the Thai language are needed.

8.2.4 Self

Buddhists' and Christians' understanding of self are very different, both in terms of when one is alive and after one's death. For Buddhists, a self or person is but the *benjakhanda* and *anattā*. For Christians, God created humankind in His image to have a relationship with Him. Is there a self after death? Radical Buddhists who concern themselves with *nibbāna* will term this question 'irrelevant'⁵⁵. State and Folk Buddhists who strive for a better rebirth, however, will probably say there is.

The mystery of death and the afterlife is unfathomable. To speak of it is to move from everyday and scientific language to the metaphysical or religious language. Is death the end of life or is there an 'and more'? What but a self could remain beyond death? If a

⁵⁴ Niles (1967), 70.

⁵⁵ Buddhādāsa in his book on *nibbāna* seems to say 'no'. However, he emphasises *nibbāna* in the here-and-now and does not reject rebirth.

Christian thinks of the soul or spirit as self,⁵⁶ is every soul immortal or is eternal life⁵⁷ the gift of the immortal God?

From the question the rich young man asked Jesus, 'Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?'⁵⁸ it is evident he did not think every soul was immortal. And Jesus' reply would confirm that he did not think so either. Is not immortality what Adam and Eve were prevented from reaching in Eden? Humans are not immortal. Only entering the kingdom can make them so. In all cases Jesus' reply took the questioner back to the law. Keeping the law brings life. Breaking the law, God's ordinance, brings death. 'You are dust and to dust you shall return.'⁵⁹ The greatest law was 'to love the Lord your God with

⁵⁶ There are several views held among Christians about the self. Nevertheless scholars agree that the self, the human-being, is created in the image of God. The writer commends the view that holds the self as a whole and refers to the self from its many different angles. The body is used in the dimension of time and space, the mind in terms of thoughts and reasoning, the heart or soul when involving the feelings and emotions, and the soul or spirit when speaking of the whole being in relation to the creator God. As N. T. Wright explains:

Soul-language, within a Christian context, is a shorthand for telling a story..., a story about the way in which human beings *as wholes* are irreducibly open to God. It is not, within Christian theology, a shorthand for a story in which a partitioned human being has a soul in one compartment, a body in another, and quite possibly all sorts of other bits and pieces equally divided up. ... Paul does not speculate as to what more precisely happens when one has thus 'departed'. In 2 Corinthians 5:1-5 he is stressing that the eventual goal is a totally renewed body, not a disembodied spirit. It is natural for us to use the language of separation of body and soul, in order that we then have a word available to talk about the person who is still alive in the presence of God while the body is obviously decomposing. But we should not think of the soul as a part of the person that was always, so to speak, waiting to be separated off, like the curds from the whey. Wright (2006), 25-26

Stephen H. Travis asserts:

More familiar in the western world is the view that the soul is immortal by nature, and at death will be released from the body to enjoy a higher life in heaven. But the origins of this theory are Greek rather than biblical. ... Resurrection language implies that the whole person is raised to life, not merely some part of us, the soul. Travis (1997), 100

There is a lot more to discuss on the Christian concept of self but this must suffice here.

⁵⁷ There are several views held among Christians about eternal life. Here are some key relevant views:

But 'eternal life' does not mean 'continuing existence'. It refers neither to a state of timelessness, nor simply to 'linear time going on and on.' In its original Jewish context the phrase fairly certainly refers to 'the life of the age to come.' ... The phrase should not, therefore, be read as though it meant a spaceless, timeless existence. It should refer to a new dispensation which God will create in the renewal of all things. Wright (2006), 7

Eternal life is a quality of relationship to God which is experienced through faith in Jesus now. Whatever happens beyond death is a development of present experience. Travis (1997), 99

⁵⁸ Matthew 19:16-24, Mark 10: 17-25, Luke 18:18-25, Luke 10:25-28.

⁵⁹ Genesis 3:19.

all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.’⁶⁰

By Jesus’ day, however, a belief in resurrection had developed.⁶¹ The earlier Jewish understanding was that this life only was God’s sphere of activity with mortals. This life included both reward and punishment - hence Job’s problem - and its solution, since he was rewarded after all his trials. It was only later, after the exile under the influence of Persian beliefs, that a doctrine of resurrection and reward and punishment after death developed. The first full biblical expression of this idea is found in Daniel 12:2.⁶² By the time of Jesus a doctrine of the afterlife was held by several groups including Pharisees, possibly the Essenes and of course Jesus himself.⁶³ Jesus claimed, ‘Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.’⁶⁴ It is not clear whether the ‘many’ Jesus referred to were from God’s people or all mankind, but he did not say ‘all’.

Can it be that the being, failing to realize it is not a self, does not reach *nibbāna*, and is instead in the cycle of wandering on? Can it be that the being who fails to claim his identity as a child of God and therefore fails to enter the kingdom of God, is extinguished? This is beyond this thesis, however if the point is later picked up, one needs to keep in mind that while folk Buddhists and state Buddhists believe in rebirth, it is not the view held by radical Buddhists like Buddhādāsa whose view on this was discussed in chapter four.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Luke 10:27.

⁶¹ For Jewish views of the resurrection see Wright (1992), chapter ten.

⁶² Reid (2004), 897.

⁶³ Ibid., 898.

⁶⁴ John 5:29.

⁶⁵ For further reading see Crockett (1996); Travis (1980); Küng (1984); Wright (2003).

Christianity is understood as a religion of relationship. 'Jesus lived and died for relationships.'⁶⁶ Without a self there can be no relationship as we know it. I have to be a self to have a relationship with my creator. This relationship may be attained in greater or lesser degrees of perfection in this lifetime. It is possible for a self to reach the kingdom of God before bodily death. The after-death and the eschatological aspects of the kingdom of God, are *abyakata* questions. According to Buddhists, speculation is unhelpful. Buddhādāsa did not speculate on what happens after death but emphasized the attainment of *nibbāna* in the here-and-now. The vital issue, for Christians also, lies in the here-and-now, whether one has a relationship with the creator God and thus enters His kingdom. The shape or form of one in the kingdom of God after physical death has not been revealed to us.⁶⁷ It is sufficient to know that the relationship with the Creator God continues from this lifetime into life after-death.

8.3 Dialogue as a responsibility to Society.

Christians and Buddhists have a responsibility to society to dialogue to build mutual understanding, enabling them to work in concert for the common good. Some scholars have reached the conclusion that there is much common ground between Buddhism and Christianity in the area of ethics and morality. Hans Küng in his pursuance of the development of a global ethic has written:

In 2001, during the 'International Year of the Dialogue of Cultures,' principles of the Global Ethic project even entered into a United Nations manifesto called 'Crossing the Divide', ... Specially stimulating for that development was the Declaration Towards a Global Ethic of the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago in 1993 ... Here it was above all the agreement between Christianity and Buddhism concerning

⁶⁶ Mejudhon (1997), 194.

⁶⁷ However, a few points have been revealed to us. One is that after death we shall know even as we are known. The self will exist beyond death. 1 Corinthians 13:12. Also some people do not advance beyond this life. The Bible describes them as 'dead in their sins'. Ephesians 2: 1-7.

the four fundamental ethical imperatives that caused me to build up that declaration of world ethic on four unalterable instructions.⁶⁸

A multicultural society cannot work unless there is a common ethic, with agreed standards of behaviour. Without them society will crumble.

The spirit of social concern and dialogue has been growing among Thai Buddhists over the past half century. A well known leader of this movement is Sulak Sivaraksa,⁶⁹ a man who can be diplomatic, but on topics where he has decided views he is very direct – unacceptably so for many of his compatriots. He has been seen as too leftist, almost republican. He has been accused of *lèse-Majesté* three times.⁷⁰ He dialogues with western Christians rather than Thai Christians. The CCT has been involved in social work with Sivaraksa but not in official dialogue. Küng is of the opinion that Sivaraksa was the first to apply Buddhist principles to world problems.⁷¹ Sivaraksa collaborated with Küng on the first draft of the ‘Declaration towards a Global Ethic of the Parliament of the World’s Religions’ in Chicago in 1993.

There are and will be opportunities where, through dialogue, collaboration between the two religions can bear fruit for the good of the whole society. A global ethic is merely the beginning.

⁶⁸ Küng (2003b), 474.

⁶⁹ Sivaraksa initiated the Thai Inter-religious Commission for Development in 1979 which publishes ‘Seeds of Peace’. He has several Foundations e.g. Komolkeemthong, Semsikkhalai and is actively involved with the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB). See Chappell (2003), 649-696.

⁷⁰ The third time in 2006.

⁷¹ Küng (2003b), 474.

8.4 Summary

Buddhadāsa's perception of Christianity reveals that the Christian response today has to overcome an injudicious introduction of the Christian message to Thai Theravāda Buddhists, an introduction lacking in-depth understanding of Theravāda Buddhism. Christianity is now seen as a lesser, more primitive response to human existence, and Christian teaching is seen as the inferior teaching when compared to Buddhism. Without having first grasped the Buddhist worldview one does not appreciate or understand the roots of Buddhadāsa's perceptions of Christianity.

Areas where words Christians use do not communicate to the Buddhist what Christians believe they are communicating are uncovered. Only when you hear the other side's response do you know what they think you have said. It is when Christians know the Buddhist worldview that they understand the incomprehensibility of what they are saying. Buddhadāsa's initiative in dialogue exposed the gulf that has to be bridged, and can only be bridged by first understanding the Thai Buddhist worldview. Well-informed dialogue may then follow.

Four areas where significant improvement in the Christian-Buddhist dialogue can be made but where further research is needed were discussed: God the Holy Spirit, love, sin and self. In each case the background knowledge of the Buddhist worldview had been lacking and this had led to miscommunication. Hence, the need is to enter each others' worldview to overcome the problem of miscommunication through incomprehension. In particular Christians should study Buddhism and be aware of various views held among Christians on some important aspects of theology. Christian concepts can then be effectively communicated to Buddhists.

If the Buddhist worldview had not been grasped before reading what Buddhādāsa had said about Christianity, it would have been easy to deem him prejudiced. Trying to understand his perspective brings the realisation that it is Christianity that has failed to communicate. Only through efforts in trying to understand the other can Christians and Buddhists achieve fruitful dialogue. Through dialogue they get to understand, affirm and correct each others' understandings, which in turn may lead to cooperation and social harmony. Therefore it is the responsibility of both Christians and Buddhists to dialogue for the mutual benefit of society.

Part Four : The dialogue - Buddhist and Christian goals compared

The process of reflecting on the two religions has highlighted their similarities and differences. The findings presented here are the result of studying Thai *Theravāda* Buddhism, in particular Buddhādāsa. Before reading other books on Buddhist and Christian dialogue, the writer's ideas were noted down to avoid an undue influence from others.¹ Not surprisingly other scholars have made similar observations but with a different slant as they were not looking through the spectacles of a Thai Christian brought up in a Buddhist context, immersed in Thai culture. Areas where fruitful dialogue can take place and where further research will be beneficial for deeper understanding between the two great belief systems will be discussed.

Chapter Nine: The dialogue journey

The writer began by seeing Buddhism and Christianity as **alien** to each other. As the research progressed, he found the differences not to be insuperable or chaotic, as he had felt, but to be moving in **parallel**. Still further along, those parallels seemed to be moving towards **convergence** but this convergence proved to be an illusion. The two worldviews remain in parallel, and, in this world at least, parallel lines do not meet. Finally he came to see there were **mutual engagements**. His understanding of both religions, Christianity and Buddhism, has deepened through dialogue. Summaries of his understanding of the Theravāda and Christian positions conclude the chapter. To the eastern mind ² these apparent irreconcilables may indeed lead to wholeness. The four stages of the dialogue journey are contemplated more closely.

¹ Smart (1993); King (1963); Yagi & Swidler (1990); Yu (1986); Streeter (1932); Gross & Muck (2000).

² For interesting insights see Nisbett (2003).

9.1. The first stage - alien

The initial understanding of the alien nature of these two worldviews lay, for example, in the understanding that in Buddhism, one was self-dependent, in Christianity, one was helpless and dependent on God. Christians believe in a creator God. Buddhists have a tiered worldview peopled with gods, angels, ghosts and creatures who could possibly be one's reborn kin – this from folk Buddhism. However, this is not the Buddha's teaching according to radical Theravādins. These folk beliefs, in spirits of the land and so on, repelled the writer as he had been brought up in the biblical understanding of one holy God who allows the worship of nothing beside Himself.

Another alien feature came from the different view of what is just and right. The biblical God of justice, 'It is only the person who sins that shall die'³ seemed a far cry from the acceptance in the name of *kamma* of the apparent injustices in the world. The pervasiveness of the belief is exemplified by official road signs in a campaign to reduce accidents reading, 'Accidents do not result from one's *kamma*.' (อุบัติเหตุมิใช่เวรกรรม). But this was before further study revealed the complexity of the different strands of Buddhism present in Thailand.⁴

9.2 The second stage - evolving parallels.

As the study advanced, examples of where Buddhism and Christianity were marching in step were found. Let us consider some that are beneficial for dialogue.

9.2.1 'Born of one's *kamma*' and 'born in sin'

Christian teaching is that humans are born in sin, are not perfect, and fall short of God's expectations; humanity is tainted with original sin. In Buddhist teaching equally, all who

³ Ezekiel 18:4.

⁴ See chapter one.

are born are tainted, not perfect. One is born of one's *kamma*. If a being arises, is born, it is evident that it has failed to reach *nibbāna*. If the being had reached the perfection of selflessness, it would have escaped the round of *samsāra* and would not be born into this *anicca* world.

9.2.2 Places of spiritual wrestling and development

Followers of both worldviews have special places where deeper understandings may be sought. For biblical writers the wilderness or desert symbolized a place of spiritual refuge (Revelation 12:6). Examples of learning experiences in the desert can be found. Moses' personal learning (Exodus 2, 3), or the Israelites forty years desert wandering. Elijah fled to the wilderness where he found refreshment (1 Kings 19:4ff). John the Baptist 'was in the wilderness until the day he appeared publicly to Israel' (Luke 1:80) and Jesus sojourned there to wrestle with his future for forty days. Similarly for the Thai Buddhist the forest symbolizes a place of spiritual refuge for development as in the tradition of the forest monks.⁵ Just as Jesus worked out his plan of action for his ministry in the wilderness, so did the Buddha find enlightenment in the forest under the Bo tree and worked out his life's path there. Buddhadasa moved from the local temple to his forest solitude, Suanmok, to pursue his life's work.⁶ In Russia it was to the forest that Christian monks and ascetics went for silence, solitude and sanctity. They followed the desert tradition of the eastern church but having no geographical desert, it was into the forest that they went.⁷

⁵ See Tambiah (1984).

⁶ See 4.1.

⁷ Louth (1991), 123ff.

9.2.3 Significance of how one handles one's experience

For the Buddhist, it is not the sense impressions in themselves that mislead but it is the way in which they are handled, the way they are employed, that is of significance. From the teaching of the *paṭiccasamuppāda*, the sense bases give rise to contact and thus to feeling, craving, attachment, becoming, birth and death. But with mindfulness (*sati*) that series can be put into the reverse mode of extinguishing attachment, craving and so on.⁸

For the Buddhist, it is a question of whether one allows the arising of attachment or whether, with mindfulness, one sees the reality of unsatisfactoriness and that one's self is *anattā*, and thus one reaches *nibbāna*. The Christian knows Jesus' words, 'It is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles.' (Matthew 15:11). Temptation in itself is not a sin - it is the giving way to temptation that is sinful. In other words, contact with the world does not, in itself, have to end in defilement and death. It is how the experience is handled that is significant. With mindfulness the Buddhist may overcome false craving and attachment, or with the Holy Spirit, the Christian may overcome the desire to follow his/her own will and submit the self to God.

9.2.4 Buddhist 'merit-making' and Christian 'good works'

Another evolving parallel is between Buddhist 'merit-making' and Christian 'good works'. Merit-making is important for Thai Buddhists but not for Buddhādāsa, who emphasised attaining *nibbāna* in this life-time via the practice of *jitwang*, being mindful that there is no *tuagoo-khonggoo*.⁹ Christian 'selflessness' is observed or expressed by 'acts of love' which are 'good works', a direct result of one's receiving God's love and

⁸ See 4.4.1 and appendix 2 section 2.2.

⁹ See 4.4.2.

God's love overflowing to others in compassion.¹⁰ For Buddhādāsa merit-making could lead to attachment, to the stock piling of merit, and thus distract one from attaining *nibbāna*. Similarly the Christian may be led astray by the pursuit of 'good works' if s/he believes the good works themselves will earn him/her a place in the kingdom of God. 'For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God – not the result of works, so that no one may boast.'¹¹

9.2.5 Meditation and Christian spirituality

In the field of spirituality there are marked parallels between Buddhist and Christian practice.¹² Thai Christian meditation is expressed in the form of *fawdeaw*¹³ (เฝ้าเดี่ยว). This is personal devotion, time to be with God. Thai Protestants are taught to have a daily 'quiet time' set aside for prayer, Bible study, and contemplation - waiting for God to speak to them and working out the application to daily life. Winston King compares Christian prayer with Buddhist meditation, noting that they are spiritual techniques for achieving desired results:

Prayer is at the heart of all Christian piety and devotion; and meditation is the one and only way recognised by Buddhism for the attainment of its highest spiritual goals.¹⁴

Buddhist meditation is a means for Buddhists to reach *nibbāna*. For the Christian, meditation is not the primary way to reach God's kingdom but should come naturally as a response to God's love. It is an activity of God's kingdom, not a means to enter it. It is a way for the meditator to come nearer to God and develop a more intimate relationship

¹⁰ James 2:18.

¹¹ Ephesians 2:8, 9.

¹² See Gross & Muck (2003).

¹³ Personal Bible study known as 'quiet time'; *Faw* means 'to be in the presence of a king', *deaw* means 'single, alone'.

¹⁴ King (1963), 136.

with God. This may seem harder for a Thai Christian as seen from the Thai translation of the Lord's Prayer. Instead of 'Our father'- *abba*, the speaker is addressing God as a kingly father, *Kadaeprabida* (ข้าแต่พระบิดา). The intimate Thai word for father is *paw* (พ่อ). *Bida* (บิดา) is the ordinary formal word for father. However, the introduction, *Kadaepra* (ข้าแต่พระ) indicates that one is speaking to a king. The formal royal word for father is *prachanok* (พระชนก). So while the Thai translation does indeed reduce the formality from 'the faraway to be revered God as king', it does not as yet come right down to Jesus' model of intimacy, addressing God simply as *abba*. *Abba* is an Aramaic word used by a son, child or adult, addressing a father, with intimacy, respect and obedience.

A study of the words used for 'meditate' and 'pray' is instructive.¹⁵ Since prayer is in essence communicating with God, and in Buddhism there is no personal God, it is not surprising that the Thai language does not have a direct word for prayer. *Samathi* is commonly used for meditate, whereas *vipassanā* is perceived as a higher level of meditation. Meditation is translated by Payutto as *yan* or *pawana*.¹⁶ Thai Catholics generally use *pawana* for both meditate and pray. 'Pray' is not found in Payutto's Buddhist dictionary. *Samathi*¹⁷ is translated as 'concentration; one-pointed-ness of mind; mental discipline', whereas *vipassanā*¹⁸ as 'insight; intuitive vision; introspection; contemplation; intuition; and insight development'. *Athithan* (อธิฐาน *adhiṭṭhāna*)¹⁹ is translated as 'resolve, decision, resolution, determination, will'. Thai Protestants usually

¹⁵ In the Lord's prayer, the Greek word translated as 'prayer' is 'asking'.

¹⁶ *Jhāna* means 'a state of serene contemplation attained by meditation; absorption; (mis.) trance; ecstasy'. *Bhāvanā* (ภาวนา) means 'mental culture; meditation; development' ; Payutto (2000c), 433, 375, 396.

¹⁷ Payutto (2000c), 406.

¹⁸ Ibid., 403.

¹⁹ Ibid., 413.

use *athithan* for pray (prayer) and do not have a particular Thai word for meditation.²⁰ *Samathi* is used only in the sense of concentration. ‘Concentrate on your work’, for example, would be translated – *meesamathinaikarn tamngan* (มีสมาธิในการทำงาน). To translate the expression ‘**Meditate** on the love of God’, Protestants will not use *samathi* but use other Thai words for meditate, e.g. *krunkid*, *kraikroan*, *truktrong*, *rampungpawana*.²¹ The range of expressions gives an indication of the many shades of understanding.

To draw nearer to God the Christian has a helper in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit helps one progress in one’s understanding of God. The Buddhist may have a meditation master to give guidance and advice, but basically he/she has to depend on him/herself. In fact on either side, the technicalities of prayer or meditation can be learnt from another person. The desired ends of the two spiritualities, however, are different. The outward forms of Thai Buddhist and Christian spirituality, the stillness, silence, concentration and possibly even posture, may be similar; the subject and purpose of meditation is different.

²⁰ A secular Thai-English Dictionary gives the meaning of :

athithan - to pray, to make a wish, to vow, to make a formal offering, to petition, to implore, to fix the mind upon, supplicate, to resolve.

- intention, purpose, resolution, determination, vow, prayer.

pawana - to meditate, to be devoted, to pray.

- prosperity, production, meditation.

vipassana - meditation, transcendental meditation, spiritual insight, contemplation, spiritual contemplation, thorough investigation, the condition of seeing clearly.

‘*samathi*’ - ‘concentration, resolve, determination, trance induced by concentration, mental fixation, calmness, tranquillity, a terrestrial *Nirvana*.’

Thiengburanatham (1999), 1533, 989, 1262, 1331.

²¹ *krunkid* (ครุ่นคิด) - to contemplate. It is made up of, *krun* - to think deeply, to be in deep thought, to brood, to meditate, to be occupied, to be engrossed ; and *kid* - to think.

kraikroan (ใคร่ครวญ) - to contemplate, to think, to consider carefully, to examine into;

truktrong (ตรึกตรอง) - to think (it) over, to think carefully, to weigh in the mind.

rampungpawana (รำพึงภาวนา) is a combination of two words; *rampung* to think of, to ponder, to reflect, to consider, to contemplate; and *pawana* to meditate, to be devoted or to pray.

Thiengburanatham (1999), 233, 290, 496, 1147, 989.

9.2.6 'Mindfulness' and the 'practice of the presence of God.'

While the Buddhist needs to practise mindfulness, mindfulness that one's self is not a self, the Christian needs to be mindful of the fact that his or her life is 'hidden with Christ in God'. (Colossians 3:3). Perhaps the Christian expression of mindfulness comes closest to the Buddhist in the 'practice of the presence of God', bringing Christ into every situation in one's life, in particular as expounded by Brother Lawrence.²²

Brother Lawrence advised that, 'We should fix ourselves firmly in the presence of God by conversing all the time with him.'²³ Just as Buddhists claim the need for experience to enlighten understanding so, 'Those only who practice it (continual converse with God) and savour it, can understand it.'²⁴ And just as Buddhādāsa wished to open the way to *nibbāna* for all by the practice of mindfulness so too Brother Lawrence, 'Everyone is able to have these familiar conversations with God, some more, some less – he knows our capabilities'.²⁵ Brother Lawrence was not a mystic in that he did not have visions and trances. His knowledge of God was based in 'the daily round the common task'. This is very reminiscent of Buddhādāsa's wariness of *samādhi* meditation with what he believed to be its distraction of the *jhānas*.²⁶ Brother Lawrence urged that it is necessary to be mindful of God, 'amid your labours, at any time you can.'²⁷ Just as Buddhādāsa would have his hearers recall the mind to its 'not a self' understanding at all times, so too Brother Lawrence said the mind must be brought back to God 'a thousand-thousand times a day', to do everything with 'thoughtfulness and consideration, without

²² Brother Lawrence c 1610-1691, lay brother in the order of the 'Discalced Carmelites'. Some of his letters, his ways and spiritual principles were first published in 1693 under the title *The Practice of the Presence of God*.

²³ Lawrence (n.d.), 19.

²⁴ Ibid., 38.

²⁵ Ibid., 41.

²⁶ See 4.4.2 and appendix 2 section 2.3.

²⁷ Lawrence (n.d.), 42; Christians should always be 'rejoicing & praying' (Philippians 4:4, 1 Thessalonians 5:17, Luke 11:5-10, 1 Thessalonians 5:18, Philippians 4:6).

impetuosity or haste'. Pausing and worshipping God in one's heart is 'to destroy self-love'.²⁸ In an uncanny echo of escaping *kamma* and achieving *nibbāna* by detachment, producing only *kamma* that is neither black, white nor mixed, Brother Lawrence in his principles says,

Everyone must admit that God is beyond understanding and that to be one with him the will must be deprived of all manner of tastes and pleasures both spiritual and bodily in order that, being thus stripped, it may be able to love God above all things. ... Since my entrance into religion I have ceased to think of virtue or of my own salvation. ... It can only be in us a remnant of self-love which, ... binds us still to self and hinders us from lifting our hearts to God.²⁹

Abbé Joseph de Beaufort writing of Brother Lawrence, concluded:

He forgot himself totally, and thought no longer of Heaven or Hell, nor of his past sins, nor of those he would commit after he had asked God's pardon for them. ... He entered into perfect peace.³⁰

The Buddhist should be ever mindful of non-self so as to avoid black, white, and mixed *kamma*. It is conscious actions that are kammic.³¹ With neither black nor white *kamma* one attains *nibbāna*. Christians should be continually asking themselves what Jesus would want of them in their particular situation. They should then try to put the answer into practice. 'Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life' (Proverbs 4:23), echoes the Buddhist practice of 'mindfulness'. Hence the state of one's consciousness in both beliefs is crucial to the outcome of one's spiritual progress.

9.2.7 Two levels of understanding language (*phasakhon-phasatham*)

Buddhadāsa's teaching about the two kinds of language, *phasakhon-phasatham* can also

²⁸ Lawrence (n.d.), 69.

²⁹ Lawrence (n.d.), 72-73, 85-86.

³⁰ Ibid., 86.

³¹ See appendix 2 section 2.1.2.4 The law of *kamma*.

be found in Christianity. That Jesus had this concept is obvious in his dialogue with Nicodemus in John 3:1-21. It is further very clear in his reference to 'living water' in the incident with the Samaritan woman at the well found in John 4:1-42. Again in the phrase 'destroy this temple' when he predicted his death in John 2:19, he is using *phasatham*, spiritual language. But to decipher such language requires a depth of understanding. The two levels of understanding language in the two religions, 'language games' as described in Phongphit's thesis, produce similar results for the two belief systems.³² The kingdom of God is hidden from those who do not understand its language or meaning,³³ similarly Buddhādāsa said, 'the one who does not speak the *dhamma* language is the one who does not 'realize' the *dhamma*'.³⁴ A proper understanding of the two levels of language can be obtained through dialogue which will deepen one's understanding of self, of others and of the terms which will communicate one's concerns to the other. Jesus was prepared to converse with the Samaritan woman at the well, a socially outcast female of a foreign race and of a despised religion. St. Peter, despite his Lord's example, had to be taught by a vision recorded in Acts 10:9ff that he had to accept dialogue with non-Jews. The Thai church, as evident in chapter seven, has to be awakened to the necessity of dialogue and the concept of two levels of understanding language.

9.3 The third stage – the illusion of convergence

A seeming convergence between the Buddhist teaching of *anattā* and the Christian teaching on denial of self soon emerged. Buddhādāsa thought that the Christian symbol of the cross could equally be a Buddhist symbol. His interpretation was that it represented an 'I' crossed out. This he saw as a symbol of no *tuagoo-khonggoo*. The realization of the 'I' crossed out is Buddhist salvation, the attainment of *nibbāna*. Buddhādāsa explained that

³² See 6.2 The Problem of Religious Language.

³³ Mark 4: 10-12, Matthew 13:11.

³⁴ Buddhādāsa (1974c), 3 ; also mentioned by Phongphit (1978), 124.

the worst kind of desire is the feeling of self: this is me, this is mine.³⁵ All three synoptic Gospels record Jesus' teaching on denial of self.³⁶ But the Christian is not taught that there is no self; rather one is taught to submit one's will, one's self, to God – as Jesus did.

This seeming convergence points to the need for a deeper exploration of both belief systems. While the vocabulary may sound similar, both teachings decrying selfishness, the reality behind the idea of 'self', the motivation behind it, and the attitude with regards to suffering that naturally hinges on it, are by no means the same.

Firstly, consider the reality behind the idea of 'self'. A self that is *anattā* contrasts with a self that is in God's image. The Buddhist self (*namarūpa*) is formed of the *benjakhandā*, and when rightly understood is recognized as *anattā*. The Christian 'being' is variously expressed from different angles: body, mind, soul, or spirit.³⁷ The 'self' can also be perceived as the human will. Humans are made in God's image and given free will. The will must voluntarily be aligned to, not lost in, the will of God. Yet, in a way, it is more than just alignment; it is *kenosis* – the emptying of self just as Christ did for humankind:

who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.³⁸

This 'emptying' of the Christian self is not to be seen as annihilation of the self or ego. It is more a hollowing out, leaving a basic shell to be filled with the Holy Spirit, with the love of Christ. It is not a self that does not really exist, but a self that really exists – one that pours itself out to be filled by the Spirit. St. Paul uses this idea in 2 Corinthians 4:7, Galatians 2:20. The Christian then should mirror Christ's self-giving love – a love that is

³⁵ See 4.4.2. Buddhādāsa's teaching on *jitwang* and not holding onto *tuagoo-khonggoo* for the attainment of *nibbāna*.

³⁶ Matthew 16:24, Mark 8:34, Luke 9:23.

³⁷ See 8.2.4 Self.

³⁸ Philippians 2:6-7.

unlimited, non-controlling and non-detached, love that is unending, precarious and vulnerable. A love that is, like *nibbāna*, beyond human description:

We may approximate to a description of authentic love as limitless, as precarious and as vulnerable. None of these three epithets is precise or wholly free from ambiguity: and we should be glad to find words more simple and exact. But perhaps this is not possible. For our description of authentic love is not a description of something which is commonly, or even occasionally, seen, felt or experienced; it is extrapolation or approximation from the shape or pattern of our practical power of discrimination. Seeing that which is rejected in the human search for love, we can approximate towards that which is sought- towards that which love 'ought to be'. It is perhaps proper that our approximation should contain a degree of mistiness and imprecision; for we are describing not that which any man has known or experienced but that towards which every man, at the depth of his being which is more profound than language, gropes and aspires.³⁹

Buddhists should be able to sympathise with Christians. The Christian kenosis is to empty the self of worldly values and fill it with godly values - with the love of Christ. The Christian does not say s/he has no self nor shall s/he be unresponsive to the world's joys and troubles but will face misunderstanding, acceptance or rejection with equanimity. No longer should Christians react personally but should act instinctively with compassion from the love of Christ.⁴⁰

Secondly, the understanding of self involves different motivations which reach the same end – unselfishness – morality. To act unselfishly in the realization that the self does not really exist is quite different from acting unselfishly because one has dedicated oneself to another. And yet, both ways call for self-less-ness and different motivations produce similar results.

³⁹ Vanstone (1985), 53 -54.

⁴⁰ From the Greek, 'bowels of compassion' which is instinctively from the bowels not from the heart - emotion, or head - reason.

Buddhadāsa said, 'Having realized the essence of both religions, we can be both Christians and Buddhists at the same time.'⁴¹ Christians can agree, but only in the sense that the same compassionate actions are produced. Buddhists accept and rely on the Triple gems⁴² leading them to *nibbāna*. This Christians cannot accept easily. Christians depend on the salvation effected by the Lord Jesus, and have only one Lord. Christians must accept the one and only (Triune) God and Jesus Christ to be their Saviour. Christians are baptised in the name of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This Buddhists cannot easily accept. Both Buddhist and Christian may produce the same outward practical results but motivations are based on different beliefs and attitudes. Both religions have high ethical and moral standards, teaching their followers to be compassionate, not to be selfish, not to hold onto the worldly things of life, not to be materialistic but asserting that life has value so one is not to kill. As Küng observed, there are points of agreement with regard to fundamental morality between Jesus and the Buddha.⁴³

The two religions have different sources, different ways of looking at life and different beliefs and motivation. But it seems that the end result is the same if the end result means what is expressed in terms of morality and ethical living. Buddhadāsa also said, 'all religions in the world in essence are the same'.⁴⁴ This is right if 'in essence' is read to equate with the practical results that is morality and ethical living, then indeed Christianity and *Theravāda* Buddhism may be the same. The Buddhist lives ethically upholding high morality on the path in ever deepening understanding of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* to reach *nibbāna*. The Christian has been enlightened by God's grace

⁴¹ Buddhadāsa (1999c), 50; see also 3.3.1.

⁴² Payutto (2000a), 72 ; Plamintr (1994), 9.

⁴³ Küng (1986), 359.

⁴⁴ Buddhadāsa (1999c), 48; see 3.3.1 for detailed discussion.

and as a result lives ethically upholding high morality. Without morality, the Buddhist cannot achieve enlightenment and the Christian is not a true Christian.⁴⁵ The Holy Spirit is a Christian's helper, helping him or her to produce the desired results. The works of Christians are a natural consequence of the assistance of God the Holy Spirit, just as fruit occurs naturally on a tree. A Buddhist depends on his or her practice of meditation to have self-control – being mindful, not allowing *kilesa* and *taṇhā* to tempt him/her to produce *kamma* that will distract him/her from reaching *nibbāna*. For a Christian, self-control is part of the product or fruit of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁶

Thirdly, one's attitude to suffering is intrinsic to the understanding of the self. Is one to embrace suffering or to escape it? John Bowker states, 'Of all religions, Buddhism is the one which concentrates most immediately and directly on suffering'.⁴⁷ One must remember that *dukkha* is not just mere suffering but encompasses the Buddhist perception of life as *anicca*.⁴⁸ Jesus telling his followers to deny themselves is in the context of losing and finding one's life.⁴⁹ To take up 'one's cross' is more an embracing of suffering in order to transcend suffering, rather than an avoidance or ending of suffering. Denying oneself will have the reward of 'saving' one's (spiritual) life. The Buddhist, however, escapes suffering, since his *dhamma* teaches that in reality there is no self to start with. The denial of the self is simply the realization of the fact that there is no self. This realization will in turn gain one the reward of *vimutti* or release from *saṃsāra* and the law of *kamma*; peace, and the freedom of emptiness in *nibbāna*.

⁴⁵ 1John 2:4-6.

⁴⁶ Galatians 5:22.

⁴⁷ Bowker (1990), 237.

⁴⁸ See appendix 2 section 2.1.1.

⁴⁹ Matthew 10:39.

9.4 The fourth stage - mutual engagement

A point of encounter rather than convergence is reached when we come to the Buddhist concept of the goal of life, *nibbāna*, an indescribable state of peace, **freedom** and emptiness; and the goal for Christians, the Kingdom of God - the reality of everlasting life continually serving God.⁵⁰ Paradoxically God's service is declared to be perfect **freedom**.⁵¹ Sometimes even engagements are not as confrontational as they seem. The subtle engagement lies in the hereafter- the afterlife.

Buddhist *nibbāna*, is not seen as some form of eternal life. It is extinction, but not nihilism, as there is nothing to be annihilated in the first place. Christians do indeed believe in eternity, but Buddhadasa saw this as incorrect. He saw Christianity and Hinduism as lower forms of teaching partly because they both believe in an eternity. The Hindu understanding of rebirth 'comes from the language of relative truth, or the language of children still sucking their thumbs.'⁵² But did Buddhadasa have a 'correct view' (*sammāditthi*) of the Christian heaven - the Kingdom of heaven or what happens at physical death in Christian teaching? If he equated the Buddhist heavenly realms with the kingdom of heaven⁵³, then he certainly did not. Had Christians engaged with him on this topic, would he have reached a clearer understanding? It is an unanswerable question.

Thai Christians do not believe that life ends in nothingness. From the perfect example of the triune human being, comes some inkling of what a Christian believes happens at death and it is neither extinction nor dissolution. Jesus' physical body hung on the cross and he died. His soul was poured out unto death (Isaiah 53:12) because he took humanity's sins

⁵⁰ Revelation 7:15; The Greek word translated 'worship' means 'service'.

⁵¹ 2 Corinthians 3:17.

⁵² Buddhadasa (1992b), 19.

⁵³ Ibid., 18.

upon himself. God, 'Made him to be sin who knew no sin'.⁵⁴ The soul that sins must die – but not the spirit.⁵⁵ Jesus' words on the cross, 'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.'⁵⁶ help us advance our understanding that his spirit arose from death to the spiritual dimension. Because of the perfection of his life, he was resurrected. He did not come back to life later to die, but was raised immortal, transformed into a spiritual body. He was seen, touched by and ate with his disciples for forty days before ascending to heaven – His kingdom of heaven.

Buddhist teaching, while not despising the body, does give most weight to consciousness.⁵⁷ Biblical teaching gives equal weight to the different dimensions of a person.⁵⁸ 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.'⁵⁹ For the Old Testament Hebrew, soul and body were not two entities but rather two ways of looking at the same thing.⁶⁰

What then passes beyond death? It is necessary to take a step back to examine the contrasting ideas of Buddhist and Christian personhood. The Buddhist concept of the composition of an individual being is the *benjakhandā*: *rūpa*, *vedanā*, *saññā*, *saṅkhāra* and *viññāṇa*, which are also part of the causally linked factors covered in the *paṭiccasamuppāda*.⁶¹ The enlightened person would realize that it is *anattā*. The *magga* to reach this realization is to reverse the *paṭiccasamuppāda* cycle, attaining *nibbāna*, becoming an *arahant*. What happens to an *arahant* after death is *abiyakata*. For Christians

⁵⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:21.

⁵⁵ It seems the physical body and sin-tainted soul are lost to death.

⁵⁶ Luke 23:46; In Greek, body is *soma*, soul is *psyche*, and spirit is *pneuma*.

⁵⁷ See Buddhādāsa emphasis on the mind in 4.4.2 and *benjakhandā* in glossary.

⁵⁸ See chapter eight footnote 56.

⁵⁹ Mark 12:29; Deuteronomy 6:5 shows a triple loving, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.' The emphasis is on loving God with one's whole being (in all one's attitudes and actions).

⁶⁰ Christians are familiar with these ideas of unity yet distinction with their understanding of God as triune: Father, Son and Spirit, and Jesus Christ as both human and divine. These views need not be tackled further here; see also chapter eight footnote 56.

⁶¹ See appendix 2 section 2.2 The *paṭiccasamuppāda*.

the human being is created in the image of God to have a relationship with his/her Creator.⁶² The human being has free will.⁶³ The human being chose to use his/her free will in ways that fell short of God's standard and thus became sinful, less than perfect. To return to the original state where a human being is in perfect relationship with God, entering His kingdom, is salvation.

The Christian 'wheel of life' perhaps can be presented as four stages. **Firstly**, the human is in fellowship with God, with his/her freedom to chose. Should s/he choose to sin, beginning from the wrong heart: not being in tune with God and thus producing the wrong thoughts, wrong words and wrong deeds,⁶⁴ (Buddhist kammic actions), s/he moves to the **second**, sinful stage, being separated from God and under condemnation. God, however, has acted through Jesus Christ dying on the cross for the penalty of sin to make it possible for the sinner to regain fellowship. Choosing to accept God's grace, s/he moves to the **third** stage of repentance - turning away from sin through confession. The **fourth** stage is forgiveness and reconciliation, accepting God's saving grace and being forgiven.⁶⁵ Having received forgiveness the cycle is completed and one returns to the first state of fellowship with God, being reconciled. As with the Buddhist cycle of the *paṭiccasamuppāda*, the biblical cycle can also be perceived as a series of repetitions. It is continuous but in terms, it is hoped, of becoming more Christ-like. The repetitions cease when a person dies and enters God's kingdom - the final goal for Christians. For Buddhists, to reach their final goal, *nibbāna*, the *paṭiccasamuppāda* cycle has to be reversed, which may be done at any stage but Buddhādāsa stresses *jītwang*, the prevention of *taṇhā* arising.

⁶² Genesis 1:26, Colossians 3:10.

⁶³ Not to be confused with the Buddhist notion of free will. For Buddhists, humans have free will within the conditions prevailing which themselves are products of previous actions, and so the freedom of one's will is constrained by conditions including one's previous actions. The law of *kamma* dealing with this is one means of explaining the *paṭiccasamuppāda*

⁶⁴ Matthew 15:19.

⁶⁵ 1 John 1:9.

Even though the working out of ethics and morality is generally the same for both religions, the process that enables one to show such ethics and morality in one's life is rather different. The Buddhist and Christian ways of arriving at morality seem to be in reverse order. Christian morality is motivated by one's understanding of one's relationship with God. The motivation for Buddhist morality is that it advances the person on the path to *nibbāna*. Buddhists practice the *ariya-aṭṭhaṅgika-magga*, keeping the *sila* – morality, practising *samadhi*, which has several pitfalls and requires the correct application to arrive at *paññā* – the correct understanding to reach *nibbāna*, the end of *dukkha*. To be free from the bondage of sin and enter the kingdom of God, Christians first have to accept Christ as their Saviour. They then receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, who transforms their lives. Christians have a relationship with the triune God. As a consequence of this relationship, morality and ethics should flow through Christian lives.

The pervasive presence of suffering in the world is a major obstacle to belief in the Christian God of love.⁶⁶ A prominent evangelical Anglican, Michael Green, states that, 'It is by far the strongest argument against the existence of God.'⁶⁷ If Christians are going to seriously dialogue with Buddhists they need to address the mystery of suffering. Some perceive the creator God as responsible for suffering since it is seen to be part of his creation. Buddhists see the world in essence as suffering and the Creator as *avijjā*.⁶⁸ In the Thai context, Irenaus' and Whitehead's ideas may help Buddhists to see suffering in a different light.⁶⁹ If evolution is understood as the creative process, the processes of growth may be better understood and Irenaus' insight that man was created immature and needed to develop to perfection in a world of mingled good and evil appreciated. For, 'How could

⁶⁶ Phongphit in his thesis also notes that Anthony Flew's arguments against religious belief are principally those of evil and suffering in the world.; Phongphit (1978), 172, footnote 25.

⁶⁷ Green (2005), 25.

⁶⁸ See 4.5.1.1 God the Father.

⁶⁹ Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947), an American Philosopher. See his *Process and Reality* (1929). Whitehead's ideas have been developed by Charles Hartshorne, Schubert Ogden, and John B. Cobb.

men have had a training for good, without knowing what is contrary thereto? ... If a man shrink from the knowledge of both kinds, and from the two sorts of impressions arising from that knowledge, without knowing it he destroys his own human being.⁷⁰ The development of man's ideas of God from the primitive God of fire, thunder and battle to an understanding of a compassionate God is but one example of the process of growth. In process theology, as expounded by Whitehead, God only influences, and does not dictate to His creation.⁷¹ This theology seems to say that it is not possible to have it both ways – either man is a puppet or he is a free agent. The theologian considers man to be a free agent – free to suffer and to create suffering. The Buddha too, saw man as responsible for his own destiny and *kamma*, his own suffering.⁷² Christian belief is that humans are living in a God-made natural universe which is working according to natural (God made) laws. So, those living in the path of a hurricane or tsunami suffer its consequences, though God through natural laws may provide even supernaturally for their rescue. God leads, He does not drive; He points out alternatives but does not coerce. Humans are given choices.⁷³ Without choice there is no true morality. Force is not a means of which God makes use.⁷⁴ Jesus uses authority, but with control and compassion, identifying with those in need.⁷⁵

The Christian God, suffering with his creation, transforming and redeeming suffering, lies beyond the Buddhist worldview. An attempt to explain 'the Christian God is a suffering God' can perhaps be put in more understandable terms from human experience by using the ideal relationship between loving parents and children. Parents love their children but children are not their puppets, children have their own free will. Hence the suffering of the loving parents. Neither *nibbāna* nor the Kingdom of God have room for suffering,

⁷⁰ Bowker (1990), 86; see also Moltmann (1985), 206ff.

⁷¹ McGrath (1994), 227.

⁷² Suwanbubbha (1994), 227.

⁷³ Matthew 7:13-14 ; Joshua 24:15.

⁷⁴ Bowker (1990), 49.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 50.

nibbāna being the realm of non-self and the Kingdom of God being where death, mourning, crying and pain are no more.⁷⁶

Another area of engagement lies in the difference in the perception of human ability. Buddhists primarily rely on themselves to reach *nibbāna*. Christians know that the good one wants to do, one cannot do, and the bad one does not want to do, one ends up doing. This is 'the inner conflict' within humanity which is a result of sin. Hence, for Christians, humanity is unable to save itself.⁷⁷ The following illustration sums up this difference:

A man was drowning. A boat came by with someone giving advice and instructions on how to swim to save himself. A second boat came by with someone reaching out a hand and telling him to grab it so he could be pulled from the water to safety. The drowning man nevertheless had to make a decision whether to follow instructions or to accept the offer of help. If the latter, he had to consciously reach out for the hand – an act of acceptance.⁷⁸

9.5 Summary of the two positions and worldviews

To understand another worldview and grasp its concepts, one's own worldview has to first be put aside, just as one cannot at one and the same time appreciate the flavours of fine French cuisine and spicy Thai curries. One must dine on them separately. It was a constant but necessary struggle not to let one's Christian background influence one's understanding of Buddhism. Familiar spectacles had to be taken off and the Buddhist spectacles put on so as to grasp Buddhist teachings. Complete objectivity or neutrality is

⁷⁶ Revelation 21:4.

⁷⁷ Romans 3:23, 7:15-25.

⁷⁸ An illustration the writer heard when he was a child. Some people may perceive this to mean the helping hand offered no development. But one needs to be rescued first then development can follow. The Buddha's teaching on the dying man who was shot by the poisoned arrow is also very relevant for this context. See appendix 2 footnote 107

of course impossible.⁷⁹ A Christian obviously has to work hard at understanding Buddhism. The writer is most grateful to the Venerable Payutto who has kindly read and commented on his understanding of the *Theravāda* position and worldview.

Whatever backgrounds the partners in a dialogue come from, it remains necessary for everyone to put aside his/her own worldview in order to study another. A well informed decision as to what the reality of one's existence is can only be made after an honest attempt at understanding other worldviews and grasping the teachings of other religions. The consequences and responsibility lie with oneself to make one's own decision as to what the reality is. Summaries of the two belief systems follow. The terms used in the summaries have profound meanings which require effort to comprehend in full. The dialogue journey has been well worth the effort, broadening one's horizons. Seeing others' points of view enables one to be more understanding, more appreciative of what others are experiencing, better able to communicate effectively what one believes and strengthens one's faith. However, before making a decision as to which position to hold or whether to reject both, there is much to ponder.

9.5.1 The *Theravāda* position and worldview

In reality, there is no real me. I am but *benjakhanda* consisting of: firstly, *rūpa* - the body, secondly, *vedanā* - the feelings of pleasure, pain and indifference arising from the bodily sense impressions. Thirdly, comes the powers of perception or recognition group, *saññā*, processing the sense impressions received by my body. Fourthly is the mind or thought group, *saṅkhāra* - mental formations, the volitional group producing black, white, mixed or neither black nor white kamma, and, fifthly, the *viññāṇa*, the consciousness group. My

⁷⁹ 'Absolute' objectivity is not possible, while 'relative' objectivity is desirable. Phongphit (1978), 30.

saṅkhāra, my thoughts, speech and actions, that is my kamma-creating volitional impulses, do not constitute an *attā* but are *anattā*.

There is no God but *Dhamma*. I am living in an *anicca* world of *suññatā*. Given this *dukkha* existence, I have to work for my own *vimutti*, to strive for *nibbāna* and break free from *dukkha* and be beyond the reach of the law of *kamma*. I take refuge in the Triple Gems: The Buddha, the *Dhamma* and the *Saṅgha*. I must learn the *ariyasacca*: 1) *dukkha*, 2) *samudaya*, 3) *nirodha*, and 4) *magga*, comprehend their deep meaning and put my knowledge into practice.

I need to set the wheel of existence, *paṭiccasamuppāda* into reverse mode to reach *nibbāna* by following the *ariya-aṭṭhaṅgika-magga*, which encompasses *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*. I can then overcome *avijjā*, *kilesa* and *taṇhā* which bind me to my *saṁsāra* existence, which is *dukkha*. Arriving at *vijjā* I am then enlightened with *paññā* to see reality as it is, I am *anattā*. At this very instant - I have reached *nibbāna*, the end of my *saṁsāra* existence, the end of *kamma* and *dukkha*. A bundle of aggregates may still live but it is no longer in debt to or bound by the law of *kamma*. I have *vimutti* and have transcended the *lokiya* and am living in the *lokuttara*. I enjoy the benefits of *nibbāna* in this world here-and-now. As there is no longer me, it can be said I have achieved deathlessness (*amata*). When this body of mine dies, you say I have *parinibbāna*.

9.5.2 The Christian position and worldview

In reality, I am a self. The real 'I' is made in God my Creator's image. I am a spiritual being, a triune person - body, mind and soul or spirit. Being 'in Christ' I may be led by him and thus be selfless, not self-centred but Christ-centred. I am living in a world which,

though impermanent, is created and ruled by a compassionate holy God. I possess free will. However, this freedom I have misused and as a result have fallen short of God's standards. Thus, I am sinful and, as a consequence, am separated from God.

I alone have the responsibility for and bear the consequences of my decision whether or not to accept God's grace so I can be saved. Yet on the other hand it is by grace we are saved through faith, and that faith is a gift of God. I cannot save myself but can be saved by accepting Jesus Christ as my God ⁸⁰and Saviour and being baptised. This means my sins have been transferred to Jesus Christ. Through his death on the cross in my place I am now redeemed from those sins and am no longer separated from God my Creator. My baptism in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit has affirmed that I am now a child of God. This water baptism puts me in God's family, the church, the community of believers who, like me, have been baptised, have accepted Christ as their Saviour, and have entered His kingdom. Moreover the 'Holy Spirit', one of the persons of the triune God, now lives within me. He is the gift from God the Father to help me live in this fallen but redeemed nature of mine whilst in this fallen world.

I am growing to love ⁸¹ God and others as a response to God's love ⁸² for me. As long as I live I have to be mindful and struggle with the deceptions of this world and depend daily on God for his forgiveness. I am not yet perfect but the 'Holy Spirit', my Guide and Companion, is helping me, changing me so that I can become more Christ-like. For me the struggle will end when I die, for I will be home with God the Father, in His kingdom, awaiting the new and perfect heaven and earth wherein is righteousness.

⁸⁰ God the Son.

⁸¹ *Katanyu*.

⁸² *mettākaraṇā*, compassion or perhaps the Thai transliterate of agape (อากาเป).

Chapter Ten : Conclusion

Mindful of Hans Küng's emphasis on the relationship between peace, dialogue and religion, the goals of *Theravāda* Buddhism and Christianity and the dialogue between the two religions have been considered. Lessons to be learnt from history, the need for effecting changes in attitude, and the importance of pursuing dialogue were uncovered. There is urgent need for more work to be done in the area of Buddhist-Christian dialogue in general and in Thailand in particular. The findings highlighting their implications and future prospects, are discussed.

10.1 Summary of findings

The brief historical survey in **Part one** revealed the crucial links between nation-religion-monarch. Narrow attitudes among both Roman Catholics and Protestants produced repeated patterns of misunderstanding. In general it can be said that the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches have not yet fully learnt from history. Most missionaries, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, came with attitudes of superiority and hence were not prepared to learn about local culture and religion. The Roman Catholics used political leverage and the Protestants used their superiority in technical know-how in science and medicine as a measure of the superiority of their faith – under the guise of God's grace.¹ They thus limited their God to the beliefs and culture of the 'West'. The missionaries lacked key understanding of the faith and culture of the people they were trying to reach. Hence, they were not successful in communicating Christian teaching in terms and in a

¹ The western missionaries perceived that God had favoured them to be more advanced than others, similar to the Jews being proud of being God's chosen race.

manner that local people could comprehend, let alone accept.² The missionaries left the local Christians with a legacy of foreignness. In particular, a Thai Christian vocabulary and terminology that is not very effective for the communication of their faith to their fellow Thais³, and the perception that it is not necessary to learn about Buddhism.⁴ They did not realise that their method of communication was incomprehensible and offensive to their Buddhist friends. They failed to realise the full range of levels at which religion operates – social, ethical, ritual, doctrinal and experiential - as indicated in the introduction.

From the Buddhist side of the dialogue, **part two**, a comparable if lesser level of misunderstanding can be traced in the writings of Buddhādāsa and Payutto. Studying *Theravāda* Buddhism reveals how lack of understanding of the Buddhist worldview has rendered the presentation of the Christian message in many ways incomprehensible. Studying Buddhādāsa uncovered his great work for Thai Buddhism and his positive attitude to others. Buddhādāsa wished for a dialogue with other religions in compassion for the world. He tried to understand Christianity, and his misunderstandings reflect not on his efforts but on the deficiency of the Christian witness to which he had access.

Buddhādāsa observed a separation of the *lokuttara* from the *lokiya* happening to Buddhism in Thailand, a similar occurrence as can be observed in the Christian west.⁵ Previously in the west and the east, the church or the temple was the centre of society. Life revolved around church or temple for education, social events and sense of community based on the *Dhamma* or Biblical values. In Thailand, *nibbāna*, the *lokuttara*

² This is uncovered and confirmed in chapters six, seven and eight.

³ Explained in chapter six and seven and discussed in chapter eight.

⁴ Uncovered in chapter seven and discussed in chapter eight.

⁵ Christianity in the western world has gradually withdrawn from the *lokiya* world. Gradually, Christianity has been marginalized, becoming perceived as hardly relevant to daily life, though for some it may be a Sunday and 'Home-group' activity.

aspect of Buddhism, became a distant goal and not so relevant to life as a whole. Buddhādāsa and Payutto have brought the *lokuttara* into the midst of the *lokiya* and have shown the relevance of Buddhist teaching to daily life. Buddhādāsa enabled *nibbāna* to return to this life without one having to wait for several lives to reach it. It was no longer necessary to become a monk in search for *nibbāna*, rather *nibbāna* is something everybody can experience in everyday living, while working, in every breath taken. There are several levels of *nibbāna* and it does not occur only when one is purified of *kilesa* (defilements) or when one becomes an *arahant*.⁶ *Nibbāna* may be reached even for a fleeting moment, when there is no longer *tuagoo-khonggoo* (I/me-my/mine), *nibbāna* here-and-now (นิพพาน ที่นี้-เดี๋ยวนี้) for laity and monk. *Lokuttaradhamma* and *lokiyadhamma* should not be separated.

Payutto, who was a beacon to his co-religionists, systematized the *Theravāda* Buddhist teachings. Payutto developed his Buddhist teaching neither depending on scientific advances nor in opposition to them but in tandem with them. He has worked to demonstrate how Buddhist teaching can be applied to other areas of life, such as the environment, politics and economics. Buddhādāsa and Payutto have made the practice of Buddhism much more socially concerned. They realize the importance of social conditions enhancing or hindering the individual's practice of Buddhism, recognising the full range of the various levels at which religion operates. They emphasize the need of the individual and modern society to be guided by *dhamma*. Christians can learn from Buddhists and maybe some Christians can take on the role of Buddhādāsa and Payutto, showing how Christianity can become relevant to their contemporaries.

⁶ Buddhādāsa (1982e), 224.

Buddhadāsa perceived Christianity as ‘A religion for the child who still needed to hold on to a God and hold on to a self.’⁷ He observed that human beings claimed and used the divine for their own personal benefit.⁸ Buddhadāsa appeared to understand that Christians believe they have a personal relationship with God. For Buddhadāsa, *Dhamma* encompasses all the functions of the Trinity.⁹ He equated the Christian God with *Dhamma* but perceived ‘seeing God as a person’ as a child’s way of seeing *dhamma*,¹⁰ of *puggaladhiṭṭhāna*.¹¹ Despite perceiving Christianity as a less developed religion than Buddhism, Buddhadāsa took the initiative to hold a dialogue with Christians. He did not speak of Christianity in a provocative way. Far from spurning the Christians as being the inferior minority, Buddhadāsa tried to understand Christianity and form rational opinions which he presented in his Sinclair Thompson Memorial lectures and various works.

It is not surprising that Buddhadāsa understood Christianity as he did. There were no Thai Christian writers explaining Christianity and making it relevant for Thais.¹² Buddhadāsa had only the Thai Bible¹³ and possibly some evangelistic literature - most probably in the form of leaflets or small booklets. He may have heard evangelistic preachers and radio programmes on Christianity. These would have been under American missionary influence, sectarian rather than representative of western theological thought. One exception to the above would be Hans Küng who visited him at Suan Mokh.¹⁴ Even in the twenty-first century, there is little Thai Christian literature.¹⁵

⁷ Buddhadāsa (1999a), 133-134; see also 8.1 Buddhadāsa’s perception of Christianity

⁸ Ibid., 158-159.

⁹ See 4.5.1 Dhamma is God.

¹⁰ It is ironic that Matthew 18:3 records Jesus as saying, ‘We have to be as little children to enter the kingdom of heaven.’

¹¹ A mature way of seeing the truth is of *dhammadhiṭṭhāna*.

¹² Phongphit reached a similar conclusion, ‘A Buddhist approach to Christianity is possible mainly through the reading of the Bible.’ Phongphit (1978), 45; see also Schmidt-Leukel, Köberlin & Götz (2001), 99.

¹³ In his lectures and publications, Buddhadāsa quoted the Thai Bible.

¹⁴ Dr Seri Phongphit relates that Hans Küng contacted him requesting his help to arrange a meeting with Buddhadāsa. Dr Phongphit took Küng to Suan Mokh where Küng and Buddhadāsa met for discussions.

Available Christian works are mostly translations of western writers. Buddhādāsa would have faced the same difficulty of finding Thai material on the Christian understanding of the Goal of Life, 'the Kingdom of God' as this thesis uncovered. There is virtually none. Even if Buddhādāsa had access to material by western scholars, it is unreasonable to expect him to have found it fully comprehensible. The lack of Thai Christian literature, in particular by Thai scholars, urgently needs to be remedied. This lack further compounds the wrongly held perception by Thais that Christianity is a western religion.

Payutto's negative attitude and feelings towards Christianity do not apparently come from his looking at Christian doctrine but are based on suspicion and mistrust in the light of the history of Christianity in Thailand. Payutto is not alone as Paisal Visalo *Bhikkhu* also forewarned Thai Christians of the possibility of emerging persecution from some Buddhist fundamentalist groups.¹⁶ Hence, the urgency of a meaningful and fruitful Christian-Buddhist dialogue.

From the Christian side in **part three**, one can see how lessons from history are relevant today. Christianity is still perceived as a foreign religion. Christians continue to communicate in terms that are incomprehensible to Buddhists. The problem of miscommunication through incomprehension stemming from the Christians still not seeing the importance of having to enter the Buddhist worldview and engaging in dialogue persists. Lack of knowledge of Buddhism makes mutual understanding and communication difficult.¹⁷

In an email to me, Professor Küng told me the focus of their conversations was how Buddhism could be lived in our present modern times. There is no available record of the discussions.

¹⁵ There were and still are very few Christian publishers in Thailand. There are two Protestant publishers – one run by OMF (Overseas Missionary Fellowship) and the other Baptist, and a few Catholic publishers.

¹⁶ See discussion in chapter five (5.3) and Santikaro Bhikkhu comments in Schmidt-Leukel, Käberlin & Götz (2001), 81.

¹⁷ Theological colleges and seminaries in Thailand do not yet see the importance of the study of Buddhism or dialogue. They are still not basic subjects for their students.

Not surprisingly, dialogue from the Christian side has been slight. Only seven written works, two by Roman Catholics and five by Protestants are to be found. All seven see the importance of the need to enter the Buddhist worldview and point to the need for dialogue. Petchsongkram made an effort to educate fellow pastors about Buddhism for the purpose of more effective evangelism. Pongudom's work confirms the finding that missionaries were ignorant of the Buddhist beliefs of the people they wished to reach. The underlying cause of this ignorance can be traced to their sense of superiority, a point made by Mejudhon and Suwanbuppha. The work of Mejudhon points to a need for changes in attitudes to meekness. Suwanbuppha's work confirms the observation of rising tensions between Christians and Buddhists and thus the urgency of dialogue. Lorgunpai's work found points of contact for dialogue with Thai Buddhists in Ecclesiastes. Lertjitlekha's work on ethics shows common ground between the two worldviews and is an encouragement to dialogue. Phongphit's work is potentially the most fruitful for dialogue because he is dealing with the problem of religious language, specifically the two levels of understanding language, *phasakhon-phasatham*. The Thai Christian community, however, is largely ignorant of his work, and indeed of the work of the other six.¹⁸

Thai Christian's views on dialogue and how their understanding of the kingdom of God impacts dialogue reveals that the majority of Thai Christian leaders are focussed on evangelism to the exclusion of other aspects of the kingdom's needs such as social welfare, economics, justice, the environment and politics. The leaders have overlooked the fact that religion does not just embrace doctrine, ethics and ceremonies but includes facets of culture, social structure and laws. Moreover, they do not seem to realise that to

¹⁸ The responses of the Christian leaders in chapter seven tend to confirm this.

present Christianity successfully in the Thai context, one needs to dialogue with Buddhists, and to be able to do this fruitfully one needs to know Buddhism. Without dialogue, Thai Christians will not be able to communicate the Christian message to Thai Buddhists in ways that are comprehensible to them.

Buddhadāsa's perception of Christianity and the responses from the Thai Christian leaders have highlighted the urgent need to elucidate the vocabulary Christians use in speaking of their faith. The Christian response today has to overcome an injudicious introduction of the Christian message to *Theravāda* Buddhists. In particular love, self, sin, and the traditional terminology of Holy Spirit or Holy Ghost for the third person of the Trinity were discussed.¹⁹ As Pongudom pointed out, the Early Church endeavoured to find some spiritual continuity with their converts' background. Thai Christians must find some means for bridge-building with Buddhists.

The dialogue journey in **part four** reveals the fact that dialogue will change the one who enters into it, deepening and widening one's understanding of self and of others, enabling one to see others' points of view so one becomes more appreciative of what others are experiencing, and better able to communicate effectively what one believes. The deeper the others' worldview is penetrated, the more meaningful the subsequent dialogue becomes.

10.2 Some implications to be drawn from the findings

The close links between nation-religion-monarchy identified in **part one** has implications of major significance. In the western world religious dialogue is seen to be primarily

¹⁹ The other biblical expressions of 'Comforter', 'Strengtheners', 'Advocate', might more fruitfully be used.

concerned with doctrines. In the Thai world, when involved in dialogue one must be sensitive to these links. Religion, culture and nationality are inextricably intertwined. Involvement with one means involvement with the others. Christianity cannot dialogue with Thai Buddhism in isolation. For example, if one is considering the law of *kamma* one is incidentally considering the position of the King. Discussing abortion, one is involved with the *sila*. Talking about 'original sin' involves everything. Lessons from history should be learnt and attitudes need to change. Qualities needed for dialogue have to be acquired - the willingness to listen and to learn. The greatest change needs to take place on the Christian side, the attitude of superiority being replaced by one of humility.²⁰

Part two on Buddhism, concentrates on the work of the Bhikkus Buddhādāsa and Payutto. The task before them, to influence both the folk Buddhists and the establishment (state Buddhists), is very difficult. To bring the *lokuttara* world with its goal of *nibbāna* back to the majority who mostly only seek to make merit for a better life next time and who are followers of superstitions is hardly more difficult than separating the establishment from Brahmanism with its links to royalty.

Christians should appreciate Buddhādāsa's and Payutto's works and learn from them. They were honest about their own religion. In particular, Buddhādāsa exemplified principles for inter-religious dialogue at work.²¹ Christians should proactively try to understand the causes of the negative perception of Christianity. Time and again as the research progressed, the present situation was explained by knowledge of the past. The evident anti-Christian feeling expressed by Payutto, his complaints against Christianity, especially the Roman Catholics, are understandable from a knowledge of history and

²⁰ See discussion in 6.7 Meekness.

²¹ See 3.3.2 Principles for inter-religious dialogue in the Thai context.

must be faced. Past mistakes need to be admitted and apologized for.²² As already stated the Christian attitude must change to one of humility, willingness to learn and to serve.

In an attempt to understand how Christianity is perceived by Buddhists and the reasons that underpin such perceptions, Christians should not have a defensive attitude, but an attitude of genuine willingness to learn and understand. Once such an understanding is reached, Christians should, like Buddhādāsa, humbly present their understanding and views with integrity - the fourth inter-religious dialogue principle. Presenting the facts of one's own religion and how it relates to the other religion, will enable the interlocutor to consider the new facts from a new angle, and thus form their own revised opinions in the light of the newly acquired understanding.²³ Thus the dialogue process progresses, deepening each other's understanding of their own religion²⁴ and of the religion of the other side of the dialogue. This thesis proposes to continue the dialogue started by Buddhādāsa with the aim of building bridges for mutual understanding between the two religions. Realizing that the work here is merely a small contribution and that significantly more remains to be done, hopefully many will carry forward the dialogue and be effective bridge-builders for the common good of our fellow human beings.

In **part three**, the survey of Christian responses shows how the situation may be ameliorated. God has not left the church without resources but it needs to make better use of them. Out of the seven works only two have been published, not in Thai but in English, hence limiting access to English speaking Thais. Petchsongkram's work is better

²² See how historical experience impacts Buddhist - Christian dialogue in Southeast Asia in Schmidt-Leukel, Köberlin & Götz (2001), 14-19.

²³ See Schmidt-Leukel, Köberlin & Götz (2001), 8-13.

²⁴ This is because, 'Dialogue can challenge us to look at our own traditions through the eyes of others and to face questions we would not have thought of on our own. Dialogue requires us to express our understanding in new ways, which makes us examine our scriptures, understanding, beliefs, customs, and practices more deeply than before.' Schmidt-Leukel, Köberlin & Götz (2001), 83.

known among a few western Christian missionaries whereas Lertjitlekha's work on ethics is better known among the English-speaking Roman Catholics. Only Mejudhon's work on meekness has won some recognition among Thai churches as he actively publicises his work through his 'Cross-Cultural Communication Training Centre (สถาบันบัณฑิตคริสตศาสนศาสตร์ เมืองไทย)'. Meekness is a good posture for dialogue. Phongphit in his social work with well known radical Buddhist social activists, like those in Sivaraksa's foundation, demonstrates how it is possible for people of both religions to work together. The Thai church, both the Roman Catholic and Protestant, needs to be awakened to the findings of these scholars.²⁵

The Thai Christian understanding of the kingdom of God has very serious implications, for the Protestants in particular. If the church leaders continue as they are, emphasising evangelism in virtual ignorance of Buddhist beliefs and to the neglect of social concerns, then the church will be greatly diminished and shut itself up into a ghetto mentality. It is imperative to develop a greater understanding of the meaning of dialogue and of the kingdom of God - beginning with the theological colleges and seminaries, the younger generation, church leaders and missionaries.

The discussion on 'Thai Christian response to Buddhism and how it might be enlarged' confirms the need for Buddhist and Christian scholars to work both separately and together on the elucidation of the terms used in both belief systems. This is by no means an impossibility. Writing the background to Buddhist thought given in appendix two was a challenge. When it came to the summing up in **part four** chapter nine, the Venerable Payutto was contacted for his comments. His gracious reply and the comments he gave

²⁵ The seven writers covered in chapter six and others in the future.

were encouraging. It can be said with some confidence that this thesis has not unsuccessfully understood Thai *Theravāda* Buddhism.

Buddhadāsa's work revealed an amazing mind at work. Buddhadāsa is a great example for both Buddhists and Christians to follow in his humility, willingness to enter dialogue and his ingenuity in elucidation of his beliefs. It is urgent that Buddhists and Christians help each other to understand each other in their mutual endeavour to stem the tide of materialism and help their fellows to grasp the truths of the *lokuttara* and not to remain in the *lokiya* world.

10.3 Future outlook

This thesis commenced by looking at the past and concludes by looking to the future. Three challenges face Thai Christians in the twenty-first century.

The first challenge is the development of effective means and vocabulary for communication of the Christian faith.²⁶ This point came up in the study of Buddhadāsa and was further discussed in chapter eight. Though the same words may be used by Buddhists and Christians, the meaning conveyed may differ greatly. Thai Christians may understand the new meanings given to the words or terms by Christianity, but their fellow Thai Buddhists cannot be expected to automatically understand the Christian meaning of the terms used. The Buddhist religious worldview gives the background against which Christian communication takes place. This is as true for the Thai Christian speaking to Thai Buddhists as for the cross-cultural missionary doing so. Listening is therefore a vital part of effective communication. What has the other person heard one

²⁶ Smith (1999), 275.

say? This is especially important as Buddhist concepts are often very different from Christian ones. The two worldviews are contrasted. Thai Christians believe in God's Incarnation in the person of Jesus Christ and aspire for the kingdom of God, whilst their Buddhist friends believe in 'rebirth' and aspire for *nibbāna*. Though the preacher was preaching in Thai, what the listener understood differed from what the preacher intended to communicate depending on the background and worldview held. The criterion for any effective dialogue must be 'what has the hearer understood?' The more interchange and feedback to clarify meaning there is, the more likely mutual understanding will come about. The Thai churches need Thai theologians to study Buddhism in order to dialogue, developing a mutual understanding and an appreciation of each others' similarities and differences. Such dialogue can then open effective ways for communicating Christianity to the Thai people, perhaps following Buddhādāsa and his ingenuity in coining new Thai terms.

The second challenge is the development of Christian thinkers and national theologians able to take part in national debates. Currently there are few such people. Christianity in Thailand is still seen as an 'import'. Not many Thai pastors have in-depth theological training. There are almost no Thai Christian writers and thinkers who produce theological material.²⁷ Virtually all theological developments and efforts at indigenization have been carried out by foreign missionaries.²⁸ What is required is to have Thai Christians writing Thai theology - without the cultural and language barriers that non-Thai inevitably bring to the work.²⁹

²⁷ As evident from chapter seven and appendix six, the lack of literature by Thais on the Kingdom of God.

²⁸ For example : Davis (1993), Koyama (1999).

²⁹ Kim (1980), 208-209.

There is a long way to go, as Mejudhon in his work found that 'Thai Christians followed missionaries' westernized methods in Christian witness. This influence was so great that they did not develop their own.'³⁰ Moreover, Mejudhon found Thai Christians continue to live in a Buddhist frame of mind and wondered whether it were possible that the teachings by past missionaries had not penetrated their worldview.³¹ The Thai church today faces a theological vacuum. Thai Christian theology needs to be developed so Thais can effectively witness to their own people. Thai churches can then become a Thai church for the Thai.

The third challenge is the training and nurture of Thai pastors. Currently there is a shortage of Thai pastors.³² Very few Thai Christians are willing to become pastors because a sacrificial life is demanded of them.³³ Even Christian parents are afraid that as pastors their children, and themselves, will have a tough life.³⁴ Most students in Thai seminaries are from the border provinces of the north.³⁵ When they graduate, many prefer not to return home but to work in Bangkok or the larger provincial cities. As a result there is a severe shortage of pastors in the provinces. Moreover, these seminary-trained pastors have great difficulty gaining acceptance from congregations in the cities because of their perceived lower status in background and education. Without pastors to lead and encourage young Thai Christians, how can the church produce the lively thinkers it needs to bridge the gulf between Buddhism and Christianity?

³⁰ Mejudhon (1997), 297.

³¹ Ibid., 282,292.

³² See chapter two.

³³ Kim (1980),206.

³⁴ The ramifications of this situation need some explanation. In the absence of social security, the parents are potentially losing support for their old age. Thailand does not have a system of social benefit like the United Kingdom. Hence children are the security for their parents. The Thai churches hardly provide pastors with a salary sufficient for living. Thai Christians need to learn to better provide for their pastors.

³⁵ Many of these are not ethnic Thais but hill tribe converts, hence they have less understanding of Thai Buddhism.

How true the saying is that if you want to look into the future, study the past. One needs to learn from the past to avoid past mistakes. To move forward in dialogue one must do just that. The errors to be avoided are: the mistake of the wrong attitude (*micchadhiṭṭi*), the mistake of ignorance (*avijjā*), and the mistake of the wrong method. In essence, the typical mistakes of any intelligent child who thinks it knows it all, does not want to listen before doing, and then messes up whatever material or project it is working with. The remedy can be seen to lie in humility, making the effort to learn and applying intelligence to knowledge.

This thesis provides Thai Christians with a tool for communicating with Thai Buddhists and enhances Thai Christians' ability to apply the Christian message in their own environment. It also attempts to help Thai Buddhists to understand some of the Christian beliefs in the hope that they will realize that the Christian message is not entirely foreign to them and for them to gain some new insights and to have an alternative response to human suffering. This thesis offers facts and a model of a dialogue journey for others to use as stepping stones if they wish to venture to engage in dialogue with *Theravāda* Buddhists

Of all religions, Judaeo-Christian beliefs would seem to be rather materialistic. From creation to redemption, resurrection, and eternity, God is seen as concerned with the material, with creation. God became incarnate in Jesus Christ in order to redeem humankind. Christians believe in the resurrection of the dead and the life everlasting (Apostles' Creed). Thai *Theravāda* Buddhists see it the other way around. This life is everlasting and this life is unsatisfactory (*dukkha*). The world and life is all *anicca*. If the element of consciousness in a *benjakhandha* group can relinquish all attachments, then that group will be able to reach *nibbāna* – remainderlessness, freedom, peace. If not then

the *kamma* remaining will 'give birth' to another *benjakhandha* group. One's attainment of *nibbāna* depends on one's own efforts to follow the Buddha's teaching. Christianity is not individualistic.³⁶ It is based on relationships - of human to God, to nature, to self, and to neighbour. While the individual has to accept or reject his/her own salvation, s/he cannot live in isolation but must be reconciled, be in contact with God, creation and fellow humans. For someone with the Judaeo-Christian worldview, a big leap forward in understanding Buddhism will be the adjustment to the concept of life continuing without personal agents - that means, there is 'will' but no 'willer', an action but no 'doer', suffering but no 'sufferer', death but no 'person' to die.

The profound goal of life, *nibbāna* or the kingdom of God is not well understood in either religion. Buddhadāsa lamented the general lack of understanding of *nibbāna* among Buddhists. Chapter seven and appendix six reveal the incompleteness of Thai Christian comprehension of the kingdom of God for which in general there is a lack of understanding.

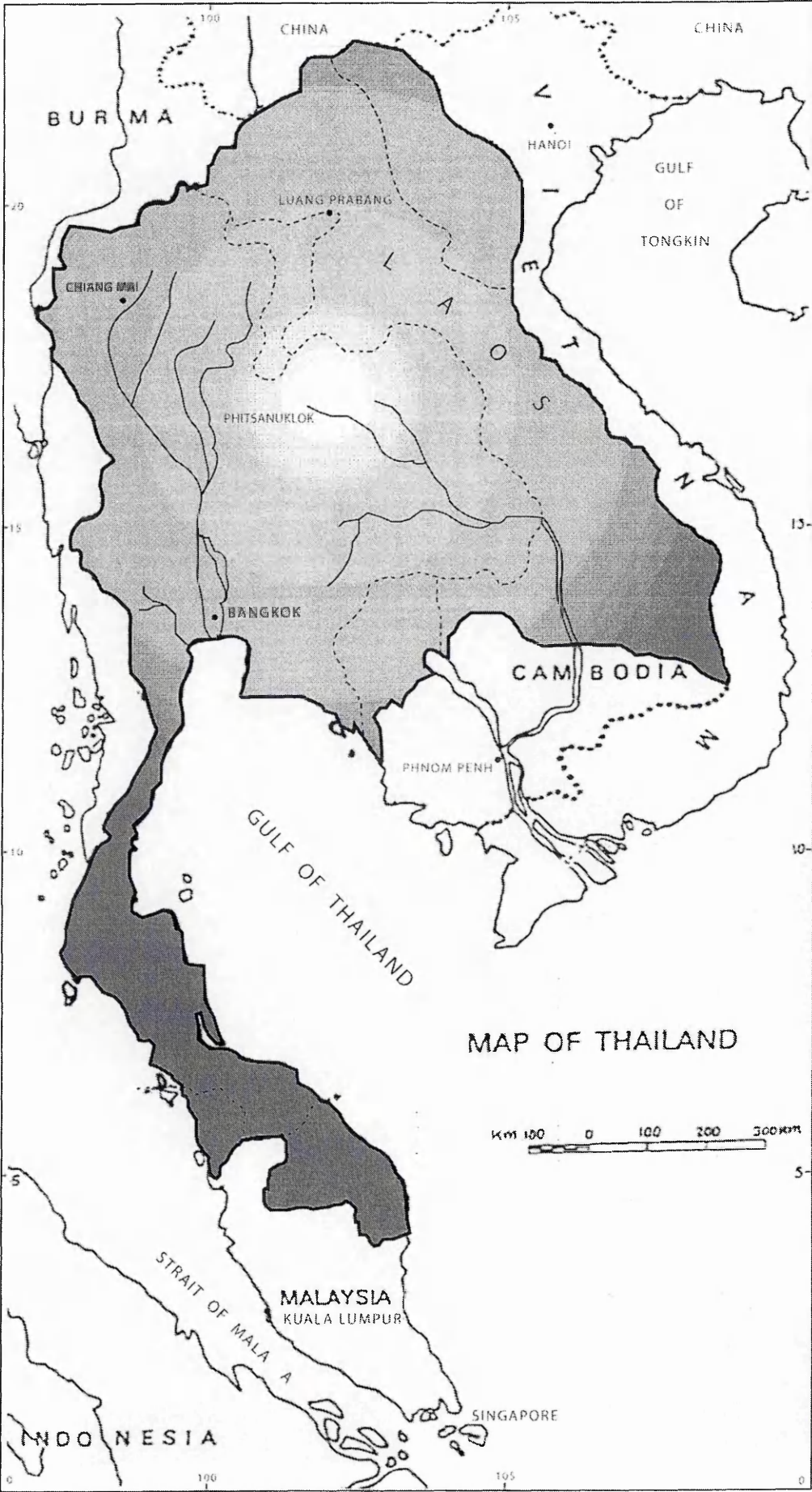
Through dialogue the writer's knowledge of the goal of life in both religions deepened but yet he cannot claim that he knows it all. He can but say that he still needs to continue the dialogue to learn more. In speaking of the goal of life, the realm of metaphysics, of the divine or the *lokuttara*, is entered. The absolute reality of the *lokuttara* cannot be completely expressed whether it be *Dhamma* and *nibbāna* or God and the kingdom of God. This is so since God or the *Dhamma* is infinite and the humans striving to understand are not.³⁷ Nevertheless, this thesis attempts to enlighten people of both religions to a deeper comprehension of the goal of life both in terms of *nibbāna* and the

³⁶ Whereas Buddhism is rather individualistic – possibly one of the attractions accounting for its popularity in today's Britain.

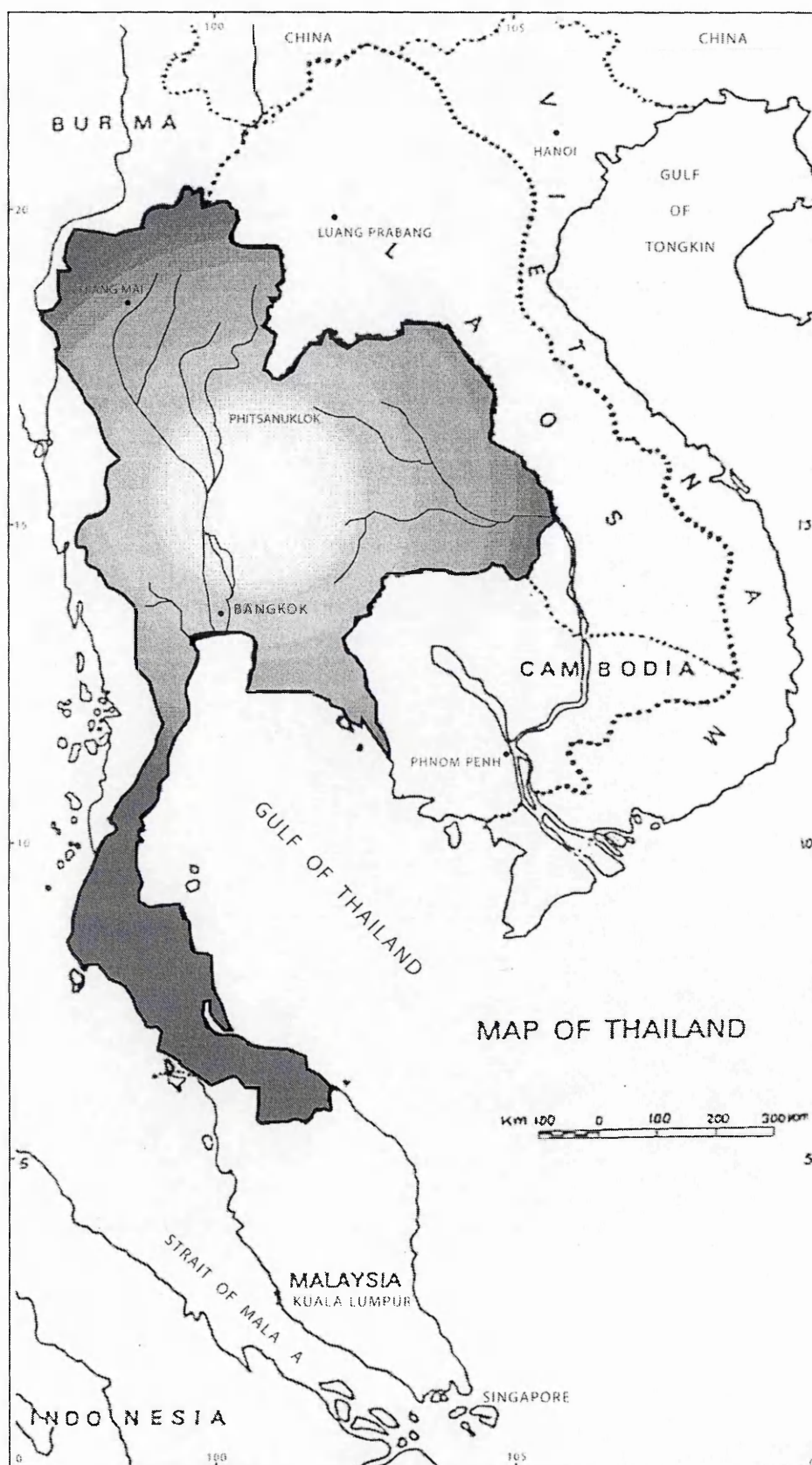
³⁷ See discussion in chapter six on Phongphit's work (6.2).

kingdom of God. What can be concluded is that there is no conclusion if by conclusion anything of finality is meant. The only conclusion that can be made is that dialogue is the vital key for further mutual understanding. As people talk to each other, their understanding grows, of themselves as well as of the other.

Appendix one : a) Map of Siam 1880



Appendix one : b) Map of Siam since 1909



Note: Maps simplified from Smith (1999), 104

Appendix Two : Thai Buddhist understanding of *Nibbāna*

From the beginnings of Buddhism there has been a wide range of opinion about the true nature of *nibbāna* although all agree it is the ultimate goal of Buddhism.¹ A number of reasons may be suggested. **Firstly**, the Buddha himself realized that not everyone would have the capacity to understand his teaching.² The Buddha was enlightened with the understanding of the *ariyasacca* (Four Noble Truths), namely: 1) *dukkha*, 2) *samudaya*, 3) *nirodha*, ultimately *nibbāna* and 4) *magga*. **Secondly**, the Buddha did not answer metaphysical questions, known as *abyakata* questions. What happens after bodily death is the realm of metaphysics. The Buddha had taught the doctrine of *anattā*, that there was ‘no self’, so the question of after death was pointless. The *arahant* was already released from the delusion of self and had left the dimension of this world to attain *nibbāna*.³ The debate over the nature of *nibbāna* can be seen to arise from the *anattā* doctrine. **Thirdly**, some scholars take the view that *nibbāna* needs to be experienced to be properly understood. Gombrich asserts:

Nirvāṇa in life is the cessation of craving, alias greed-hatred-and-delusion, and is indescribable because it is the opposite of the process of life as we know it; to discuss it in isolation is futile because you have to understand what, according to Buddhist ontology, is being negated. It is futile also for a more important reason: *nirvāṇa* is an experience, and all private experiences (e.g. falling in love) are ultimately beyond language (though they can to some extent be discussed with others who have had the experience). Experiences do have an objective facet. Objectively hunger is want of food, etc.; subjectively it is a kind of pain, imperfectly describable. My description of *nirvāṇa* as the cessation of craving is objective. As ... the indescribability of *nirvāṇa* is unsurprising. For the convenience of discourse Buddhist saints did apply various kinds of epithets to it, and thus objectify and even reify what was for them the experience of a negation of a process. Had they foreseen the confusion that this would cause they might have kept silence.⁴

¹ Chandrkaew (1982), vii.

² Ward (1947), 38; Harvey (2002), 22.

³ Harvey (2002), 64-65.

⁴ Gombrich (1972), 492.

There is a need to acquire a greater understanding of *nibbāna* in order to have more than a superficial dialogue.

2.1) The Buddhist worldview - the context for *nibbāna*

The Buddhist is living in the world of *saṃsāra*, the endless cycle of cause and effect with no known beginning of the first cycle.⁵ All things come into being dependent on various factors and change or cease because of other factors. The cycle is known as *paṭiccasamuppāda*, to be discussed later.⁶

In the *saṃsāric* world the self, *attā*, has no independent existence. The *attā* depends on factors which are constantly changing – ‘I’ am hungry or thirsty, angry or pleased, conscious or unconscious, hot or cold depending on various external factors.⁷ The personal apprehension of the fact of this *saṃsāric* world leads to *nibbāna*. *Nibbāna* is release from the wheel of *saṃsāra*. As the Buddhist scholar Dr. Chinda Chandrkaew explains:

Nibbāna is, therefore, neither the annihilation of anything real, nor is it the union of an individual self or soul with the Absolute, nor is it entirely indescribable. It is just the realization of things as they really are, resulting in a permanent cessation of all the wrong views about things, and thus a transcendence of the worldly experience.⁸

The Buddha described the *saṃsāric* world which exists in space and time as *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anattā*⁹, the three fundamental characteristics of all existence:¹⁰

⁵ Harvey (2002), 32.

⁶ Ibid., 54.

⁷ Ibid., 48.

⁸ Chandrkaew (1982), IX.

⁹ Harvey (2002), 50.

¹⁰ It is interesting to note a Biblical parallel. Lorgunpai tells us that, ‘The nuance of the word ‘hebel’ usually rendered ‘vanity’ in the book of Ecclesiastes covers the meanings of these three terms: *dukkha*,

Monks, whether the *Tathāgatas* (the Buddhas) have arisen or not, this fundamental law, this rule of the law, this lawful necessity, prevails, namely, all conditioned (or formed) factors of being are impermanent (*anicca*),... all conditioned (or formed) factors of being are subject to suffering (*dukkha*), ... all things (*dhamma*) are without the soul or substance (*anattā*).¹¹

2.1.1 *Anicca*

The following scripture is chanted at Thai funerals, to remind the mourners of the nature of existence:

Impermanent, alas, are all conditioned things,
 Their nature is to arise and pass.
 They come into existence, then they cease;
 Their allaying, their calming, is peace.¹²

All conditioned or formed things (*saṅkhāra*) - even the universe - are impermanent; they arise and then they cease. The understanding of *anicca* is a basic part of understanding the First Noble Truth, *dukkha*. Nothing in the universe is fixed, all is changing. The whole of existence is in constant motion, arising and passing and re-arising.

One state (*dhamma*), on perishing, makes room for its succeeding state by transmitting the whole of its energy (*paccaya satti*). Therefore, every succeeding state possesses all the potentialities of the state just preceding it with something more. In this respect, no two successive states can be definitely said to be the same or entirely different, but being the same process of a constant flux.¹³

The idea at first may seem strange but modern science confirms this view. Here is an example from radiation chemistry:

I am not sure that radiation chemistry as such has many implications for religion, although the short life of radicals and excited states, emphasized by the habit of describing their

anicca, and *anattā*'. The word μάταιοτες used in the New Testament has similar connotations. Lorgunpai (1995), 209.

¹¹ Chandrkaew (1982), 3 quoted from *Aṅguttara Nikāya : Uppādā vā bhikkhave Tathāgatānam anuppāda vā Tathāgatānam phitāva sā dhātu dhammaṭṭhitatā dhammaniyāmatā sabbe saṅkhāra anicca, - sabbe saṅkhāra dukkha, - sabbe dhamma anattā*.

¹² *Samyutta Nikāya* II, 192 Cited in *The Essential Teachings of Buddhism* (1989), 41.

¹³ Chandrkaew (1982), 4.

lifetime as infinite if they are stable beyond the period of observation (which could be microseconds or less) has on at least one occasion prompted reflection on the impermanence of things...¹⁴

Today there is greater awareness of the science behind the understanding that the whole of existence is in constant motion, arising and passing and re-arising. Indeed, the first law of thermodynamics says that energy is not lost, but changes form.¹⁵ Thinking of the human body, it changes over the years, almost every cell will have been replaced since birth. Chandrkaew further illustrates the argument from the *Milindapañhā*:

A man, whose lamp caused the destruction of the whole village by fire, ... cannot be guiltless on the ground that the flame of his lamp is not the same flame that burnt the village. The flame is, no doubt, not the same flame, but definitely not a different one (*naca so naca añño*), for the process of the flame is in the same continuity.¹⁶

The reality of impermanence is revealed through, and based on, the mechanism of *paṭiccasamuppāda*. Understanding that all is dependent on the arising and passing of a myriad of factors is progressing towards enlightenment, *nibbāna*. The idea of *anicca* refers not only to the world but includes the people in it. Chandrkaew explains the Buddhist view of an individual being (*pañcupādānakkhandha*):

An individual being is composed of two parts, viz., *name and form* (*nāma-rūpa*). The Form consists of the four primary elements of earth (*paṭhavī*), water (*āpo*), fire (*tejo*) and wind (*vāyo*), while the Name is divided into four groups, viz., feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), mental formations (*saṅkhāra*) and consciousness (*viññāṇa*). Thus, the matter (*rūpa*) and the four mental qualities are traditionally called 'Fivefold Attached Group' (*pañcupādānakkhandha*). All these five groups, though being separate elements, are not a haphazard process (*adhiccasamuppanna*), but subject to the definite law of Dependent Origination. ... They are a continuous, unbroken series of activity that leads to one unit of an integrated

¹⁴ Swallow (1989), 423.

¹⁵ Roger & Mayhew (1992), 15 (The first law of thermodynamics, i.e. energy conservation in a close system is discussed.)

¹⁶ Chandrkaew (1982), 4.

personality as the particular ego-consciousness of the moment, in which the 'I' only builds itself up *a posteriori* on the basis of continued experiences.

Personality is, ... , not an unchanged entity but a process or stream (*santāna*) of physical and mental forces that are arising and passing away.¹⁷

Buddhist teaching on *anicca* is that one is doomed to disappointment if one thinks that one can grasp at anything. The pain of disappointment will be avoided if one recognizes one's own impermanence.¹⁸ In popular Thai understanding *anicca* is used to express the uncertainty of life. So we live impermanently, in the midst of impermanence. If we do not recognize and accept this, we set ourselves up for *dukkha*.

2.1.2 *Dukkha* and its related concepts

In the words attributed to the Buddha: 'As before, so also now, I preach only *dukkha* and the cessation thereof.'¹⁹ Grasping the truth of *dukkha* is the first step on the path to being saved from it.²⁰ *Dukkha* is described:

Birth is *dukkha*; decay is *dukkha*; illness is *dukkha*; death is *dukkha*. Presence of objects we hate is *dukkha*; separation from objects we love is *dukkha*; not to obtain what we desire is *dukkha*. In short, the fivefold attached aggregate of existence (*pañcupādānakkhandha*²¹) is *dukkha*.²²

¹⁷ Chandrkaew (1982), 7, 13.

¹⁸ A Christian psychiatrist, M. Scott Peck, would seem to agree with the idea that beings change continually. He suggests that evolution – or God – is towards the development of self awareness. From birth to death our self awareness grows or atrophies as we use or refuse to use our power of thought. – Our 'physical and mental forces that are arising and passing away', to use Chandrkaew's words quoted above. Peck sees existential suffering – mental or physical pain as part of the process of development. Rather than something to be avoided, this pain or suffering is a growth factor. (Peck (1999), 68-70, 144-146) This view of continual change can be seen as akin to the Buddhist view that the being is always changing, in constant flux. The reasons for the changes and the reactions to them given by Buddhists or Christians are different.

¹⁹ Chandrkaew (1982), 1 quoted from *Majjhima Nikāya* I., 140; *Samyutta Nikāya*.III., 119: *Pubbe cāham etarahi ca dukkhañc'eva paññāpemi dukkhassa ca nirodham*; Harvey (2002), 47.

²⁰ This view of life as *dukkha* has points of similarity with the Christian understanding of sin and salvation. Until the truth of *dukkha* is grasped one cannot move towards *nibbāna* – until the reality of sin is acknowledged there can be no salvation.

²¹ See glossary *benjakhandā*.

²² Chandrkaew (1982), 8 quoted from the *Vinayapitaka*; Harvey (2002), 47- 48.

The idea behind the word *dukkha* embraces a whole range of experience. The common English translation, ‘suffering’, is normally applied by westerners to pain or distress of body or mind and opposed to health and well-being. In Buddhism *dukkha* also means unsatisfactoriness, imperfection and change. Thus *dukkha* underlies our life attached to the wheel of *saṃsāra* and *paṭiccasamuppāda*.

Three categories of *dukkha* may be distinguished.²³ The **first**, *dukkha-dukkha*, is suffering due to birth, illness, decay, and death. The **second**, *vipariṇāma-dukkha*, is the suffering caused by the fact that all things are temporary. It is the inevitable suffering that comes because moments of pleasure cannot be extended. The **third** form of suffering, conditioned-ness, *saṃkhāra-dukkha*, is linked to the second. It is suffering because of the nature of the world, *saṃsāra*. The understanding of this is not intrinsically pessimistic. On the contrary it can lead one to free oneself from the conditioned and find release in the unconditioned, *nibbāna*.²⁴ The arising of *dukkha* is described in the teaching of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* (conditioned arising):

When one perceives a sound, odour, taste and so on, if pleasant, he is attracted; and if unpleasant, he is repelled. Thus, whatever kind of feeling he experiences ... pleasant, unpleasant or indifferent, if he delights in the feeling, cherishes it and persists in cleaving to it, then in so doing, lust crops up; but lust for feeling brings about attachment (*upādāna*); through attachment arises becoming (*bhava*); through becoming arises birth (*jāti*) and through birth arises decay, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, etc. This is the process by which the whole mass of *dukkha* springs up.²⁵

From this we can see that the essence of *dukkha* is in the reception that one gives to the experiences of life. One’s attitude is the key to the experience of *dukkha*. There is no suffering without a person to experience it:

²³ Chandrkaew (1982), 8.

²⁴ Peck makes a parallel observation when he distinguishes two kinds of suffering – the undesirable, leading to the damage of the personality; and the beneficial, leading to growth in understanding. Peck (1999), 144 Everything changes but God does not. God, in this sense, can be equivalent to *nibbāna*.

²⁵ Chandrkaew (1982), 10 quoted from *Majjhima Nikāya* I, 266.

According to the doctrine of *anicca*, the desiring of impermanent things can only lead to the 'I' or desirer suffering the loss of those things. If an individual recognizes that he is also impermanent, i.e. *anattā*, he will not take everything to himself.

The three aspects of *dukkha* operating in life will not do any harm if we do not regard objects or states of existence in terms of possession, attachment, or I-ness, and my-ness. It is, then, "not the 'world' or its transitoriness which is the cause of suffering but our attitude towards it, our clinging to it, our thirst, our ignorance". ... And this is the reason why the Buddha sums up the entire *dukkhas* under the designation of the fivefold attached aggregate of existence (*pañcupādānakkhandha*).²⁶

The Buddha perceived that the causes of suffering are *avijjā*, *kilesa* and *taṇhā* which are powerful factors holding humans in the cycle of *paṭiccasamuppāda*, keeping them in *saṃsāra*.²⁷ The law of *kamma* is the natural law which governs this *dukkha* existence.

2.1.2.1 *Avijjā*: *Avijjā* is not ignorance in the sense of lack of information but that of failing to be aware of the true nature of things. It is a failing or shortcoming in thinking, in the mind, and a failure to understand reality.²⁸ For the Buddhist, understanding will come through meditation,²⁹ as a means of triumphing over *avijjā*. By reaching a true understanding of *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā*, *nibbāna* may be attained.³⁰

2.1.2.2 *Kilesa* : The ten *kilesa*³¹ are negative characteristics in the mind, linked together with *taṇhā*. When an individual lacks mindfulness (*sati*), these *kilesa* can take over the mind and great suffering results. In Buddhism, one's existence

²⁶ Chandrkaew (1982), 10.

²⁷ Chandrkaew (1982), 17, 149; De Silva (1979), 37; Payutto (1995c), 906-908.

²⁸ Harvey (2002), 56.

²⁹ For the Christian, understanding comes through revelation and by grace so one attains the kingdom of God.

³⁰ The Buddha realized that not many might understand him but nevertheless, in his compassion remained in the world and taught 'The Way' though few might be able to find and follow it. One should also remember Jesus taught, 'For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.' Matt 7:14. Folk and State Buddhists perceive that they may have to travel many existences to achieve *nibbāna*.

³¹ See glossary.

depends on the state of one's mind (*citta*).³² Undisturbed by *kilesa*, one is free from conflict and finds peace.

2.1.2.3 *Taṇhā* : Three types of *taṇhā* are defined.³³ *kāma-taṇhā* - craving for happiness and sensual pleasure in this present existence; *bhava-taṇhā* - craving for existence or self-preservation which is the cause of rebirth. This is seen in the plant and animal worlds as well as among humans; and *vibhava-taṇhā* - craving for non-existence. This does not mean craving for *nibbāna* but refers to the desire to be rid of unpleasant situations. *Taṇhā* is always linked to *kilesa*.

2.1.2.4 The law of *kamma* : *Kamma* literally means action or deed but not all actions should be seen as *kammic*. The Buddha taught that it was intentional actions, whether conscious or subconscious, that held *kammic* value: black (bad), white (good), black and white (mixed bad and good) or neutral (neither bad nor good).³⁴ This fourth *kamma*, neutral *kamma*, is the result of the realization of *anattā* and *suññatā*, when the self is seen as not a self, insubstantial and ever changing. While involuntary actions are not held to be *kammic*, actions may result from the subconscious as well as the conscious mind.³⁵ Supposing someone is driving home having had too much to drink and unfortunately jumps a red light and kills a couple crossing the road. In Thailand, this

³² Christian teaching would agree with this stress on the mind. The writer of the Hebrew Proverbs was aware of the importance of 'mental forces'. For instance, 'Guard your ability to think and plan wisely' Proverbs 3:21, 'The most important thing is for you to be careful in the things you think. Your thoughts control your life.' Proverbs 4: 23. One's thoughts, according to the New Testament, define whether one is 'right' or 'wrong'. 'For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander' Matthew 15:19 Moreover, Paul stressed the use of the mind in his argument on spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 14 : 14-15

'... For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unproductive. What should I do then? I will pray with the spirit, but I will pray with the mind also; I will sing praise with the spirit, but I will sing praise with the mind also. ...'

St Paul emphasized, 'Those who are spiritual discern all things' 1Corinthians 2:15-16

St. Luke told us that having established that he had risen from death, Jesus then, 'opened their *minds* to understand the scriptures, ...'. (Italics mine) Luke 24:45

Buddhists seek a mind free of *kilesa*; Christians seek to have the mind of Christ. 'Let the same *mind* be in you that was in Christ Jesus, ...' (Italics mine) Philippians 2:5 In essence the two ideas are similar, each requiring self-control.

³³ Payutto (2000c), 101; Chandrkaew (1982), 149; Harvey (2002), 53.

³⁴ Payutto (1988c), 21-22 .

³⁵ There can be no facile 'I didn't mean it' as an excuse.

is not considered manslaughter. The killing was unintentional.³⁶ The driver did not know the couple. There was no intention or reason to kill them. The fault was in not observing the fifth precept to avoid intoxicants. The legal penalty is for dangerous driving.³⁷ If the couple had not been on the road at that time they would not have been hit. Perhaps the persons who died were due to die according to their *kamma* anyway.

The belief in the good begetting good, and the evil, evil is pretty well universal.³⁸ In Buddhist thought one's *kamma* is of one's own creating. Moreover, *kamma* is an important concept used, especially by State & Folk Buddhists, to explain suffering, especially the bad fortune that attends the apparently meritorious or the good fortune that attends the wicked.³⁹ Good actions are referred to as *kusala*, skilful or wholesome, as they produce uplifting mental states in the doer, hence, wholesome states of mind. Skilful actions are considered 'merit' (*puñña*, *boon*), which is auspicious or fortunate, as it purifies the mind leading to good fortune. Bad actions are *akusala*, unskilful or unwholesome. Unskilful actions are inauspicious, bringing ill fortune or demerit (*apuñña* or *pāpa*, *bap*).⁴⁰ Thai Christians use this Thai word '*bap*' for sin. In Buddhist thought the individual is neither sinful nor guilty when acting demeritoriously. An 'unskilful' action or black *kamma* leads to bad consequences and hence should be avoided.⁴¹ The gathering

³⁶ Falvey asserts that 'Intent or motivation as being more important in karmic terms than one's deeds.' He refers to Mark 7: 20-23, John 8: 3-8 and Matthew 5:28 pointing that in both Christianity and Buddhism intention is held as significant. Falvey (2002), 56, 63, 75.

³⁷ *Thai Criminal Code* (1932) section 290 (no intention to kill).

³⁸ The principle of the law of *kamma* is pointed to in the Bible e.g. Proverbs 11:18 'The wicked earn no real gain, but those who sow righteousness get a true reward' or Proverbs 22:8 'Whoever sows injustice will reap calamity'.

³⁹ Christ denied this idea when he commented on the people killed by the falling tower of Siloam. They were not 'worse offenders' than other people. Luke 13: 4, 5.

⁴⁰ Harvey (2002), 41- 42.

⁴¹ The Buddhist has no concept of being answerable to a creator or god, so 'sin' and 'guilt' lose their significance. But the sense of 'shame' or 'loss of face' is very Thai, if not Buddhist.

of good *kamma* is in one sense a distraction. One does not reach *nibbāna* because of a favourable balance of white *kamma*. One can merely hope to have a better life.⁴²

Harvey explains:

The law of karma ... is not operated by a God, and indeed the gods are themselves under its sway. Good and bad rebirths are not, therefore, seen as 'rewards' and 'punishments', but as simply the natural results of certain kinds of actions.

It is, in fact, seen as particularly fortunate to be born as a human being. In the lower realms, there is much suffering and little freedom of action. In the heavenly realms, life is blissful in comparison with human life, but this tends to make the gods complacent, and they may also think they are eternal, without need of liberation. The human realm is a middle realm, in which there is enough suffering to motivate humans to seek to transcend it by spiritual development, and enough freedom to be able to act on this aspiration. It is thus the most favourable realm for spiritual development.

Buddhist heavens, then, are *this* side of salvation; for *Nibbāna* is beyond the limitations of both earthly and heavenly existence.⁴³

To reach *nibbāna* one's actions should be based on the understanding of *anicca* and *anattā* and therefore be neither black nor white. Not white with the desire for a good outcome nor black because done under the influence of *kilesa* and *taṇhā*. When one acts with equanimity producing *kamma* which is neither black nor white and so with no *kammic* result - then one has reached *nibbāna*.

2.1.2.5 *Samsāra*: The cycle of *samsāra* has no known beginning or end but according to the Buddha each person has had any number of past lives:

I directed my mind to the knowledge and recollection of former habitations : I remembered a variety of former habitations, thus: one birth, two births, three... four... five... ten... twenty... a hundred... a thousand... a hundred thousand births, and many an eon of integration and many an eon of disintegration and many an eon of integration-disintegration; such a one was I by

⁴² A being may be reborn in another sphere in the next life. There are five levels of existence: 1) the lower worlds, akin to hell (*duggati*, *vinipāta*, *niraya*); 2) the animal kingdom (*tiracchānayoṇi*); 3) the spirit-sphere (*pettivisaya*) or sphere of ghost-beings and demons; 4) the realm of human beings (*manussā*); and 5) the formless realm (*arūpaloka*) where the spirits have no bodily form - the realm of gods (*devaloka*) and higher beings or spirits. De Silva (1979), 39.

⁴³ Harvey (2002), 38-39.

name, having such and such a clan, such and such a colour, so was I nourished, such and such pleasant and painful experiences were mine, so did the span of life end.⁴⁴

Incalculable is the beginning, brethren, of this faring on. The earliest point is not revealed of the running on, of beings cloaked in ignorance, tied to craving.⁴⁵

How the cycle of *saṃsāra* proceeds is explained by the *paṭiccasamuppāda*.⁴⁶

2.1.3 *Anattā*

Attaining *nibbāna* is release from *saṃsāra* and the *kammic* burden that keeps us tied to it via the understanding of *anattā*, that there is no ‘real me’, no ‘self’. If one grasps the teaching of *anicca* and applies it to oneself one will see that one’s life is as illusory as everything else. The doctrine of *anattā* and *anicca* are closely linked:

Body, brethren, is impermanent. What is impermanent, that is suffering. What is suffering, that is without the self. What is without the self, that is not mine, I am not that, not of me is this self. Thus should one view it by perfect insight as it really is. For the one who thus sees it as it really is by perfect insight, his heart turns away, is released from it by not grasping at the *āsava*.⁴⁷

The Buddha equated ownership with control. If one is in control of something, one ‘owns’ it; if one is not in complete control, one does not own it. Following from this the doctrine of *anattā* states that individuals are not the owners of their bodies for nobody can fully control his or her body:

Body, brethren, is not the Self. If body, brethren, were the Self, then body would not be involved in sickness, and one could say of body: ‘Thus let my body be. Thus let my body not be.’ But, brethren, in as much as body is not Self, that is why body is involved in sickness, and one cannot say of body: ‘Thus let my body be; thus let my body not be.’...

⁴⁴ *Majjhima Nikāya* I (1954), 28.

⁴⁵ *Samyutta Nikāya* II (1922), 118.

⁴⁶ See section 2.2.

⁴⁷ *Samyutta Nikāya* III, 39 (The *Khandha* Book iii, 43, XXII, § 45).

‘Now what think ye, brethren, Is body permanent or impermanent?’ ‘Impermanent, Lord.’

‘And what is impermanent, is that weal or woe?’

‘Woe, Lord.’

‘Then what is impermanent, woeful, unstable by nature, is it fitting to regard it thus: ‘this is mine; I am this; this is the Self of me?’

‘Surely not, Lord.’

‘So also is it with feeling, perception, the activities and consciousness. Therefore, brethren, everybody whatever, be it past, future or present, be it inward or outward, gross or subtle, low or high, far or near, - everybody should be thus regarded, as it really is, by right insight, - ‘this is not mine; this am not I; this is not the Self of me.’⁴⁸

From an understanding of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* and the composition of an individual (*benjakhandā*⁴⁹), *anattā* can be explained:

Since the matter,⁵⁰ feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness are impermanent or perishable, and thus are *dukkha*, it is not possible to regard them as a self or as belonging to a self. The significance of this connection is that even the consciousness (*viññāṇa*)⁵¹ is included, which is the innermost mental faculty and always regarded as a self or soul - - a permanent entity that “feels, that experiences now here, now there the result of good or bad deeds.” ...the five-fold group of existence is called *Anattā* because they are out of control, void, ownerless, unsusceptible to the wielding of power, and precluding a self.⁵²

If the body and mind were really ‘self’ we should be able to exercise ultimate control over them. However, *anattā* is not simply lack of control which is only a factor in understanding *anattā*.

⁴⁸ *Samyutta Nikāya* III, 59-60 (The *Khandha* Book iii, 68, XXII, § 59 (7)).

⁴⁹ See glossary; Payutto (2000d), 140.

⁵⁰ Also known as form (*rūpa*).

⁵¹ It is ironic that the word *viññāṇa*, which is *vinyan* (วิญญาณ) in Thai, has come to mean in the common mind ‘spirit, soul, or ghost’. A Thai definition for *vinyan* found in the Thai-English Dictionary is, ‘The thing that inhabits in the human body making it a person when the body decays ‘the thing’ still remains’.

Thiengburanatham (1999), 1257.

⁵² Chandrkaew (1982), 11-12.

The doctrine of *anattā* denies belief in any abiding entity, self, substance, or any permanent principle, standing behind the process of change or becoming. There is no room for a 'first cause' or 'Creator God', since existence is a process, without beginning, but beginning always. And existence is the result of *kamma* and *vipākakamma*. No existing object is static and nothing can be considered in isolation for everything only exists in a process. 'A 'person' is a collection of rapidly changing and interacting mental and physical processes, with character-patterns recurring over time.'⁵³ Insofar as there is action, reaction is inevitable, and so the life-process is extended to its inevitable destination determined by *saṅkhāra*. However, what a man sets out to do either bodily, verbally, or mentally, with intention, will have its inevitable effect: favourable, unfavourable, or neither. This is the law of *kamma* and *vipākakamma* and the related *saṃsāra* doctrine. The concept of *anattā* teaches that since one does not have definitive control over one's body, one should cultivate the conditions that conduce to *nibbāna*. Buddhism teaches that each individual can work out his or her own way to reach *nibbāna* through meditation, ethical behaviour and detachment. These Buddhist practices are simply a practical application of the *paṭiccasamuppāda*.

2.2 The *paṭiccasamuppāda*

The *paṭiccasamuppāda* is at the heart of Buddhism, underlying the Four Noble Truths. It describes the basic Buddhist worldview that everything is intricately interdependent. This is not the same as one thing causing another. Dependence is unavoidable: causes may be avoided. The doctrine states:

⁵³ Harvey (2002), 52.

That being, this comes to be; from the arising of that, this arises; that being absent, this is not; from the cessation of that, this ceases.⁵⁴

The *paṭiccasamuppāda* states the principle of conditionality, that all things arise and exist due to the presence of certain conditions, and cease once the conditions are removed. All are inter-dependent, nothing is independent except *nibbāna*. The twelve *nidāna* (linked factors) of the *paṭiccasamuppāda*, are in sequence as follows:⁵⁵

- 1) *avijjā*, 2) *saṅkhāra*, 3) *viññāṇa*, 4) *nāmarūpa*, 5) *saḷāyatana*, 6) *phassa*,
 7) *vedanā*, 8) *taṇhā*, 9) *upādāna*, 10) *bhava*, 11) *jāti*, 12) *jarāmaraṇa*

The *paṭiccasamuppāda* can only to be truly understood by the disciple who is prepared to meditate on its insights to make them his own. The difficulty of understanding the *paṭiccasamuppāda* is confirmed by the Buddha himself in the *Mahanidanasutta*. When the Venerable Ananda perceived that the *paṭiccasamuppāda* was easy to understand, the Buddha corrected him:

Do not say so, Ananda; do not speak like that. Deep indeed, Ananda, is this *Paṭiccasamuppāda*, and it appears deep too. It is through not understanding this doctrine, through not penetrating it, these beings have become entangled like a matted ball of thread, like a matted bird's nest, like *munja* grass and rushes, subject to the round of rebirth (*samsara*) in a state of suffering.⁵⁶

The *paṭiccasamuppāda* unites and explains the Four Noble Truths.⁵⁷ It describes how *dukkha*, the first Noble truth, arises – the conditioned arising which is the second noble truth, *samudaya*. By reversing the order, we get the cessation of *dukkha*, i.e. *nibbāna* which is the third noble truth, *nirodha*. And the fourth noble truth, *magga*, is the way one must follow which leads to the cessation of each *nidāna*. Harvey asserts:

⁵⁴ Harvey (2002), 54 quoted from *Samyutta Nikāya* II, 28.

⁵⁵ This traditional outline of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* teaching is drawn from Payutto. (Payutto (1999a), 26-32). There are also variations of this twelve *nidāna*. These variations show the contributions of other conditions. Further information may be found in Harvey (2002), 54-55; see also appendix four.

⁵⁶ Lertjitlekha (1998), 89 quoted from *Digha Nikāya* II, 55.

⁵⁷ The Four Noble Truths may be perceived as a simplified and practical form of the *paṭiccasamuppāda*.

By becoming aware of how one is conditioned, one can come to alter the flow of conditions by governing, suspending or intensifying them so as to reduce *dukkha*, and ultimately stop it entirely by transcending the conditions.

Besides explaining the origin of *dukkha*, the formula also explains karma, rebirth and the functioning of personality, all without the need to invoke a permanent self.⁵⁸

To escape this cycle one has to embrace the truth of *anattā*. As Lertjitlekha explains:

The argument of the Buddha is based on the observation that if anything could be called *attā* or one's self, one should have full control over it. So if we claim that there is an "individual", "I" or "*attā*" as a self entity, one should have full control over it. This is the Buddhist definition of possession. In fact, since one does not have full control over our (sic) possessions, so one cannot claim them as his (sic).⁵⁹

Buddhist practices are based on understanding *paṭiccasamuppāda* at ever deeper levels, hence one aims to follow in reverse the cycle of *paṭiccasamuppāda* with the right view of *anattā*, so one can escape suffering, freeing oneself from *saṁsāra*, and reach *nibbāna*. The Buddha's doctrine of *paṭiccasamuppāda* cleared a path between the philosophies current in India in his day. It denies *sassatavāda* (eternalism), the ego's final absorption in the great *ātman* and the other extreme, *ucchedavāda* (nihilism), that everything ends in nothingness.⁶⁰ The Buddha 'confined himself to *majjhimāpaṭipadā* (Middle Way), renouncing both absolutism and extreme scepticism'.⁶¹

The distinction between *puggala* (person), and *attā* (self) must be pointed out. The *puggala* is made up of the five *khandas*⁶² (*nāmarūpa*, 4th *nidāna*). The five *khandas* arise from consciousness, volitional actions, and ignorance (3rd, 2nd, and 1st *nidāna*). Since the person is the aggregate of the five *khandas*, the bases of sense impressions, sense contact,

⁵⁸ Harvey (2002), 55-56.

⁵⁹ Lertjitlekha (1998), 88.

⁶⁰ Chandrakaew (1982), 12; Harvey (2002), 58.

⁶¹ Lertjitlekha (1998), 51.

⁶² See also Chandrakaew's Buddhist view of an individual being (footnote 17).

feelings, craving, and attachment (5th, 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th *nidāna*) arise respectively. Then the self with its suffering is created, leading to birth, ageing and death (10th, 11th, and 12th *nidāna*).

The *paṭiccasamuppāda* links birth and death – everything is ‘conditioned’ by something else. We must not confuse that with the idea of transmigration of the individual mind or consciousness (*viññāṇa*). An example of the Buddha’s teaching on this comes from *Majjhima Nikkaya*.

A bhikkhu, Sati Fisher-son, gives out as the Buddha’s own teaching that ‘It is *viññāṇa* which persists and is reborn after death unchanged.’ He is summoned to repeat this before the Master. ‘Is it true, Sati, that you said this?’ ‘Yea, Lord, so do I understand you to teach.’ ‘What, Sati, is the *viññāṇa*?’ ‘That speaker, that feeler, lord, who experiences the results of good and evil deeds done here or there.’ ‘Now then, foolish man, whence got you such a doctrine as being teaching of mine? Have I not taught you by many methods that *viññāṇa* arises from a cause; and except from a cause, *viññāṇa* cannot come to be?’⁶³

Viññāṇa does not survive death. The doctrine seems difficult for the eastern mind, even more so for the western mind to grasp. Buddhism teaches rebirth without transmigration.

An illustration is given in the *Milindapanha*:

Where there is no transmigration Nagasena, can there be rebirth?’ ‘Yes, there can.’ ‘But how can that be? Give me an illustration.’ ‘Suppose a man, O king, were to light a lamp from another lamp, can it be said that one transmigrates from, or to, the other?’ ‘Certainly not.’ ‘Just so, great king, is rebirth without Transmigration.’ ‘Is there any being, who transmigrates from this body to another?’ ‘No there is not.’ ‘But if so, would it not get free from its evil deeds?’ ‘Yes, if it were not reborn, but if it were, no. This name-and-form commits deeds, either pure or impure, and by that karma another name-and-form is reborn, and therefore it is not set free from its evil deeds.’⁶⁴

In the *paṭiccasamuppāda*, however, it is consciousness (*viññāṇa*) which seems to serve as the link to name-and-form (*nāmarūpa*). Harvey explains:

⁶³ Quoted from Ward (1947), 87.

⁶⁴ Quoted from Ward (1947), 87-88.

The most important context in which constructing activities⁶⁵ condition consciousness⁶⁶ is in the generation of consciousness in a future life; for it is said that the ‘evolving’ or ‘conductive’ (*samvattanika*) consciousness is the crucial link between rebirths (*M.II.262*). At death, the momentum set up by constructing activities (and craving) is not cut off; but impels the evolving flux of consciousness to spill over beyond one life and help spark off another.⁶⁷

No substantial self can be found which underlies the *nidānas*, owning and operating them: they simply occur according to conditions. Thus it is inappropriate to ask, for example, ‘who craves?’, but appropriate to ask what craving is conditioned by, the answer being ‘feeling’ (*S.II.14*) ... the twelve *nidāna* formula is a synthesis, which shows how such components dynamically interact to form the living process of personality, in one life and from life to life.⁶⁸

The Buddha did not explain his doctrine of rebirth to his followers. When queried, he classed the question as futile and ignorant. By not attempting to answer directly, he diverts attention to the impossibility of an impermanent body or mind being a soul. Nevertheless, Buddhist scholars through the ages have been attempting to find an answer.⁶⁹ Harvey explains:

Of a person in two consecutive rebirths, it is said, ‘he is not the same and he is not different’ (*Miln.40*): ‘he’ neither retains any unchanging essence, nor is wholly different. No unchanging ‘being’ passes over from one life to another, but the death of a being leads to the continuation of the life process in another context, like the lighting of one lamp from another (*Miln.71*). The ‘later’ person is a continuation, or evolute of the ‘earlier’ one on which he is dependent. They are linked by the flux of consciousness and the accompanying seeds of karmic results, so that the character of one is a development of the character of the ‘other’.⁷⁰

Chandrkaew explains how man determines his own destiny and that it is the energy in the will-to-live, not a personality that continues:

The reality of rebirth (*punabhava*) is, according to Buddhism, brought about by the will-to-live based on ignorance (*avijjā*) of each individual

⁶⁵ constructing activities (*saṅkhāra*) - 2nd *nidāna* of *paṭiccasamuppāda*.

⁶⁶ *viññāṇa* - 3rd *nidāna* in the *paṭiccasamuppāda*.

⁶⁷ Harvey (2002), 57-58.

⁶⁸ Harvey (2002), 56.

⁶⁹ Ward (1947), 90-91.

⁷⁰ Harvey (2002), 58.

himself. This will-to-live is nothing but *taṇhā* (craving), as it is said : it is *taṇhā* which produces continuing existence, accompanied by pleasure and lust, finding its delight here and there, particularly in thirst for pleasures, for existence and for nonexistence. Though *taṇhā* is the immediate cause for rebirth, the entire situation is ruled over by ignorance. But, according to Buddhism, man is not entirely determined by the law of cause and effect; in reality within this framework he is endowed with capacity to modify or change his destiny. In other words, in the way the group of his mental and physical factors are associated, they induce some results to the effect that, firstly, he can be aware of his own situations, and secondly, he can with his knowledge choose and direct his course of life. The Buddha says, 'There is cause, there is reason for the defilement of creatures ... There is cause, there is reason for the purification of creatures. ... There is strength, there is energy, there is human vigour, there is human effort; all creatures, all beings are not without power, energy ... they are not bent by fate, chance and nature'.⁷¹

The Buddha was not a fatalist. He did not approve those who believed that everything experienced at present is all due to previous actions (*pubba-kamma-vāda*). The Buddha emphasized that deterministic fate (*niyati*) and *kamma* are very different concepts. The idea of *kamma* emphasizes the importance of human action and its effects; people make their own 'destiny' by their actions. Difficult situations are not to be passively accepted. Only when things happen in spite of efforts to avert them, might they be put down to past *kamma*.⁷² The *Suttapitaka Samyutta Nikāya*, IV, 230 states:

Those monks and priests who say or hold the view that whatever pleasant or unpleasant or neutral feeling a person experiences is the consequence of what was done in the past they go too far. Therefore, I say they are wrong.

Experiences of feelings arise from bile, from phlegm, from wind, from the union of bodily humours, from seasonal changes, from stress of circumstances, and from chance external happenings, as well as from the ripening of *kamma*.⁷³

⁷¹ Chandrkaew (1982), 17-18.

⁷² Harvey (2002), 40.

⁷³ Cited in *The Essential Teachings of Buddhism* (1989), 59.

Nor did the Buddha believe man to be the puppet of a supreme deity (*issaranimmāna-vāda*). He did not think man's fate was determined by chance (*ahetu-vāda* - all are uncaused and unconditioned). Chandrkaew says that:

Man's position, according to Buddhism, is unique. He is so constituted that he is capable of performing a free act to some extent. Although his personality is always changing, evolves and grows depending upon several factors physical and psychical, and thus being in for suffering and *dukkha*, still with his 'right knowledge' and 'creative will' he can within this realm of *samsāric* existence put forth his attempts to give this life one direction rather than another. ... He is like the Buddha and other successful personalities in the world *if* he strives hard and persists in doing his work that leads to the supreme knowledge and ultimate reality.⁷⁴

Buddhism is totally human centred: one is the author of one's own salvation or damnation. As the *Anguttura Nikāya* V, 288 states:

Beings are the owners of their *kamma*, heirs of their *kamma*, born of their *kamma*, related to their *kamma*, supported by their *kamma*. Whatever *kamma* they do, for good or for bad, of that they are the heirs.⁷⁵

It seems it is *kamma*, not a person, that cycles on endlessly from birth to death, and from birth to death again. The quality of the circling *kamma* determines the future conditions (kind of birth) that occurs.

2.3) Meditation – the path enabling Buddhists to reach *nibbāna*

To achieve enlightenment, the wisdom to see things as they really are, and thus escape the round of *samsāra* and reach *nibbāna*, the Buddhist needs to meditate. Each one is responsible for his/her own release from *dukkha* and attaining *nibbāna*. Meditation promotes spiritual development, reduces the impact of suffering, calms the mind and

⁷⁴ Chandrkaew (1982), 18-19.

⁷⁵ Cited in *The Essential Teachings of Buddhism* (1989), 57.

reveals the true facts of existence.⁷⁶ There are two main forms of meditation practiced in Thailand: *samādhi* and *vipassanā*. *Samādhi* aims at concentrating the mind on an object, whereas *vipassanā* aims to comprehend the true nature of the object under meditation. These two kinds of meditation are related to each other. The Pali canon also shows some points of contrast between the two. For example, *samādhi* leads to developing *citta*, which leads to the abandoning of *raga* by means of liberation of the heart. In contrast, *vipassanā* leads to developing wisdom and then to the abandoning of ignorance and the liberation of understanding.⁷⁷ *Samādhi* has been seen as a preliminary to *vipassanā*. Sometimes they are seen as separate yet complementary, at other times as harmonized and integrated together.⁷⁸ It is impossible to replace one with the other. Despite the differences, both are instruments that may lead to *arahant*-ship and *nibbāna*.

To meditate and reach *nibbāna*, there are preliminary conditions to fulfil. One must understand that the meditator has embarked on *ariya-aṭṭhaṅgika-magga*, also known as *majjhimāpaṭipadā*, the fourth Noble Truth, *magga*, the path that leads to *nibbāna*. The eight elements of this Path may be divided into the preliminary conditions: *sīla* - right speech, action, livelihood; *samādhi* - right effort, mindfulness, concentration; and *paññā* - right view, thought.⁷⁹ Harvey asserts:

Theravāda meditation builds on a foundation of moral virtue (*sīla*) to use right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration as mental ‘tools’ to cultivate the mind and thus develop wisdom.

The order of the eight Path-factors is seen as that of a natural progression,... Each path-factor conditions skilful state, and progressively wears away its opposite ‘wrong’ factor, until all unskillful states are destroyed. ... With each more refined development of the virtue-meditation-wisdom sequence, the

⁷⁶ Conze (1969), 11.

⁷⁷ Cousins (1984), 59.

⁷⁸ *Chambers Dictionary of Beliefs and Religions* (1992), 65; Harvey (2002), 253-254.

⁷⁹ Harvey (2002), 68; Chandrkaew (1982), 154.

path spirals up to a higher level, until the crucial transition of stream-entry⁸⁰ is reached. The Holy Path then spirals up to Arahatsip.⁸¹

As the first preliminary condition, *sīla*, to prepare oneself for meditation one should train oneself in *benjasīla*. The second preliminary condition, *samādhi*, is to overcome internal defilements. This refers to thoughts and feelings which are more hidden than visible outward behaviour.⁸² The objective is to become insightful and peaceful. Meditators, therefore, need to practice *sati* to release the hold of their thoughts and overcome the contaminated mind. *Sati* is the process of bearing something in mind, be it remembered or present, with clear awareness. It is defined as ‘not floating away’, that is, an awareness which does not drift along the surface of things, but is a thorough observation. *Sati* is crucial to the process of meditation because, without its careful observation, things cannot be seen ‘as they really are’. The Dhammapada asserts:

What we are today comes from our thoughts of yesterday, and our present thoughts build our life of tomorrow: our life is the creation of our mind. If a man speaks or acts with an impure mind, suffering follows him as the wheel of the cart follows the beast that draws the cart.⁸³

The teaching of Buddhism is that the mind has two parts⁸⁴ - the surface which may easily be in turmoil, and the depths which are tranquil.⁸⁵ Meditators often separate themselves

⁸⁰ Known as *Sotāpanna* which is the first of four *arriyapuggala*. See glossary.

⁸¹ Harvey (2002), 69-71.

⁸² Christian teaching recognizes ‘the defilements within us’ as when Jesus taught, “Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” Matthew 5:28.

⁸³ *The Dhammapada* (1973), 35.

⁸⁴ Psychiatrists similarly speak of two parts of the mind, the conscious and the sub-conscious. Freudian psychology holds the subconscious as a pit where all the mind’s evils are dumped and where the roots of psychological disorders can be found, it is far from tranquil. Peck disagrees with Freud. He locates the disorders in the conscious mind, in the refusal to think with integrity. Of the subconscious, the depths, Peck writes:

It is the possessor of extraordinary knowledge that we aren’t naturally aware of. It knows more than we know – the “we” being defined as our conscious self. How we come to know that which is hidden and unconscious, is mystery – and mysterious.

So Peck parallels the Buddhist idea of the mind with its turbulent surface and calmer depths.

Peck (1999), 67, 78

⁸⁵ Conze (1969), 17.

from all outside distractions so that they may enter the depths of their minds. To do so they must focus their attention on particular objects. A variety of objects may be used, such as a Buddha image, their own breathing, even a corpse. The object is used to train the mind to focus on only one thing and to counteract negative character traits.⁸⁶ A mind of single intent is more effective, particularly in penetrating the truth.⁸⁷

Various hindrances to progress need to be overcome. These hindrances known as *nivaraṇa* are: *kāmacchanda* (sensual desire), *byāpāda* (ill will), *thinamiddha* (sloth and torpor), *uddaccakukkucca* (restlessness and worry) and *vicikicchā* (fear of commitment or doubt). In place of the hindrances, *jhānas* need to be developed. There are five mental factors: *vitakka* (applied thought), *vicāra* (examination or sustained thought), *pīti* (joy), *sukha* (happiness) and *ekaggatā* (one-pointedness of mind) counteracting the hindrances.⁸⁸ The meditator's mental preparation and the accumulated merit from former lives determine the speed at which the meditator reaches *nibbāna*. Along *ariya-aṭṭhaṅgika-magga* the meditator moves towards *nibbāna*. There are four stages of nobility, each marked by its reward. The person achieving these stages is an *ariyapuggala*,⁸⁹ and receives the *ariyapol*, corresponding to the stage reached from the lowest to the highest levels as follows: *Sotāpatthipol*, *Sakadāgāmipol*, *Anāgāmipol* and *Arahantpol* respectively.

Excellence in *samādhi* meditation does not necessarily lead the meditator to *nibbāna*.⁹⁰

One may be sidetracked by the joy and happiness brought by the levels of *jhāna*. It will

⁸⁶ Harvey (2002), 247.

⁸⁷ Conze (1969), 19.

⁸⁸ Chandrkaew (1982), 156; Harvey (2002), 249-250.

⁸⁹ Fox (1973), 154.

⁹⁰ There is a Christian idea which helps our understanding, where St. Paul warns in 1 Corinthians 13 that gifts of the Spirit will not get us to heaven but only gifts of the Spirit used in the right way.

be insight into the truth of *anicca*, *dukkha*, and *anattā*, not just intellectual assent, that releases the meditator from *saṁsāra* to *nibbāna*.⁹¹ *Vipassanā* will produce a mind unclouded by personal feeling, not bound by wishes, wants, or needs: a mind open to dispassionate awareness, able to observe the world without attachment, though with full attention – the cessation of individuality. This mind will observe and consider all phenomena wisely.⁹² It will be free of *avijjā*, *taṇhā* and *upādāna*. Hence meditation leads its practitioners to *nibbāna*.

2.4) *Arahant* – the enlightened person who reached *nibbāna*

The *arahants* are those who have reached *nibbāna*, *nirodha* (released from *dukkha*), are out of *saṁsāra*, and transcendent (*lokuttara*) – no longer *lokiya* but dwell in *paññā* not in *avijjā*. The Buddha (and *arahants*), on reaching *nibbāna*, have fully realized *dhamma* in the supreme sense - *nibbāna* is equivalent to the supreme *dhamma*. Thus the Buddha is one who is ‘*dhamma* become’.⁹³ The *arahant* does not have to physically die on reaching *nibbāna* but he is in a neutral relationship to the world – neither attracted nor repelled. The *arahant* detached from *saṁsāra* is no longer under the law of *kamma*. His physical body will one day die and it may experience pain but the mind is detached from this - seeing it as a non-self passing phenomenon.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Jesus Christ also taught his followers that intellectual assent to his Lordship was not sufficient for one to enter his Kingdom – action was required. Matthew 7:21.

⁹² Sumedho (1989), 97-98.

⁹³ Harvey observed that Buddhists see the Buddha (and *arahants*) as man-become-*dhamma*. Contrasting to Christians seeing, Jesus as God-become-man. (Harvey (2002), 28) One should point out that not only is Jesus ‘God-become-man’ but also was understood as ‘man-become-God’ as for example when St. Thomas said, ‘My Lord and my God’. John 20:28 Jesus was at the same time fully man and fully God. Jesus was not a God in the form of a man.

⁹⁴ Harvey (2002), 64-65.

Arahantship from earliest times has been said to be achievable by studying (*pariyatti*) or by practising (*paṭipatti*). This is illustrated by two of the first disciples. Sāriputta, exemplifying *pariyatti*, is referred to as the Buddha's right-hand and is acclaimed for his wisdom. Moggallānā, exemplifying *paṭipatti*, was the Buddha's left-hand, famed for his meditation and mystic powers (*iddhi*).⁹⁵ As an *arahant* the Buddha performed supernatural actions and any *arahant* may also perform them. Today's Buddhists combine *pariyatti* and *paṭipatti*. It may be deduced that *pariyatti* predominates among today's establishment and radical Buddhists; and that the mystic powers which come with meditation practice (*paṭipatti*) appeal more to Folk Buddhists.

2.5) *Nibbāna*

In the *Tipiṭaka Samyutta Nikāya*, *arahant* is equated with *nibbāna*⁹⁶ :

The destruction of lust, the destruction of hatred, the destruction of illusion, friend, is called *nibbāna*.⁹⁷

The destruction of lust, friend, the destruction of hatred, the destruction of illusion, - that is called *arahantship*.⁹⁸

The definitions quoted above use the term destruction in describing *nibbāna*. In describing the indescribable, negative terms are often employed,⁹⁹ such as annihilation or extinction, as in the putting out of a fire (here the fire of desire and attachment) - the extinction of desire, the destruction of greed, hate, delusion, *khandas* and *saṃskāras*.¹⁰⁰

Positive designations for *nibbāna* include: peace, *vimutti*, equanimity, cooling, serenity,

⁹⁵ Tambiah (1984), 16; Harvey (2002), 24.

⁹⁶ So too the Kingdom of God may be closely identified with Christians. 'The Kingdom of God is within/ among you.' Luke 17:21 or 'The kingdom of God is....righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.' Romans 14:17.

⁹⁷ *Samyutta Nikāya* IV (1927), 170.

⁹⁸ *Samyutta Nikāya* IV (1927), 171.

⁹⁹ For example in the Athanasian Creed where God is described as 'uncreated' and 'incomprehensible'. God encompasses all things just as, for the Buddhist, *Dhamma* does.

¹⁰⁰ Joshi (1979), 193.

bliss,¹⁰¹ and ‘deathlessness’ or *amṛta*.¹⁰² For the Buddhist, *nibbāna* is deliverance. Positive and negative descriptions, whether *nibbāna* is existence, or non-existence, or both existence and non-existence, or neither existence nor non-existence¹⁰³ are of little importance beyond that fact.

Nibbāna, while essentially undefinable, has been described on three levels:¹⁰⁴

- 1) *Tadanganibbāna* (ตังคณิพพาน) is defined as a state that comes about momentarily when external conditions occur, fortuitously, so that no idea of ‘I’ or ‘mine’ arises.¹⁰⁵ It is the attainment of mental calm because of the influence of a peaceful environment. Any disturbance in the external environment would in turn re-effect the disturbing influence of *kilesa* upon the mind.
- 2) *Vikhambhananibbāna* (วิคัมภนนิพพาน) is a state when mental calm is attained because of the mental control exercised in *samadhi* meditation, in which intense concentration arrests or paralyses the arising of *kilesa*. *Kilesa* are not in fact abolished but only paralysed from acting by the force of meditative concentration.
- 3) *Samucchedanibbāna* (สมุจเจตนิพพาน) or *Parinibbāna* – the highest form of *nibbāna*, is attained when mental peace results from the actual ending rather than the simple repression of mind-disturbing *kilesa*. There are two types of *parinibbāna*. The first is attained by the *arahant* while still living in this world. It is called *sa-upādisesanibbāna* or *kilesaparinibbāna* (กิเลสปรินิพพาน). This means that while the *arahant* has indeed rid himself of all defilements, the *khandas* that constitute his body still exist. However he is considered to be in a state of equanimity beyond the power of *kilesa* to draw him back to the cycle of

¹⁰¹ De La Vallée Poussin (1971), 113.

¹⁰² Harvey (2002), 60.

¹⁰³ De La Vallée Poussin (1971), 111.

¹⁰⁴ Payutto (1995c), 278.

¹⁰⁵ Buddhādāsa (1974a), 8.

the *paṭiccasamuppāda*. The second is *Anupadisesanibbāna* (อนุปาทิเสสนิพพาน) or *khandha-parinibbāna* (ขันธปรินิพพาน) which is attained when the *khandas* of existence are extinguished, at the physical death of the *arahant*, when there is no remainder of physical existence.¹⁰⁶

2.6) Summary

Nibbāna relates to the doctrine of *anattā*, meaning non-attachment, particularly to the notion of the self or soul which gives rise to *dukkha*. If in reality there is no self, who is it that attains *nibbāna* and experiences happiness, when *nibbāna* is described as a state of supreme bliss? Is *nibbāna* total annihilation or eternal bliss? The problem arises because of the complication of the meaning of *anattā*. Some people argue that *anattā* is inconsistent with rebirth and reject the latter as not belonging to the teaching of the Buddha because *anattā* is a total denial of the self; death is final and there is nothing that survives death.

However, *Theravāda* Buddhism has claimed that the doctrine of *anattā* is consistent with the belief in rebirth and explains that the person who is born is neither the same nor is he/she another. *Anattā* implies the realization of the emptiness of oneself and this realization is *nibbāna*. It is an experience in which self has been completely transcended; an experience of supreme bliss when nothing of self remains. This does not mean that *nibbāna* is annihilation. *Nibbāna* is the crossing from the sensory world to the calm world. Its destination is immovable peace. It transcends definition and goes beyond all concepts.

¹⁰⁶ Harvey (2002), 61.

What happens to an enlightened person beyond death: does he/she still exist or not? The Buddha kept silence on this, it is a mystery, and the Buddhist tradition has resolutely refused to speak about it. One reason was that the Buddha saw speculating over it as a time-wasting distraction from spiritual practice and not conducive to *nibbāna*.¹⁰⁷ The state of an enlightened person after death is one which is beyond normal comprehension. Not that *nibbāna* is a state of nothingness, but that the world of *dukkha* can be referred to as no longer existing for him. As Chandrkaew says:

What is really annihilated is our ignorance (*avijjā*) or, as has been admitted by the Buddha: our lust, hatred and delusion.¹⁰⁸

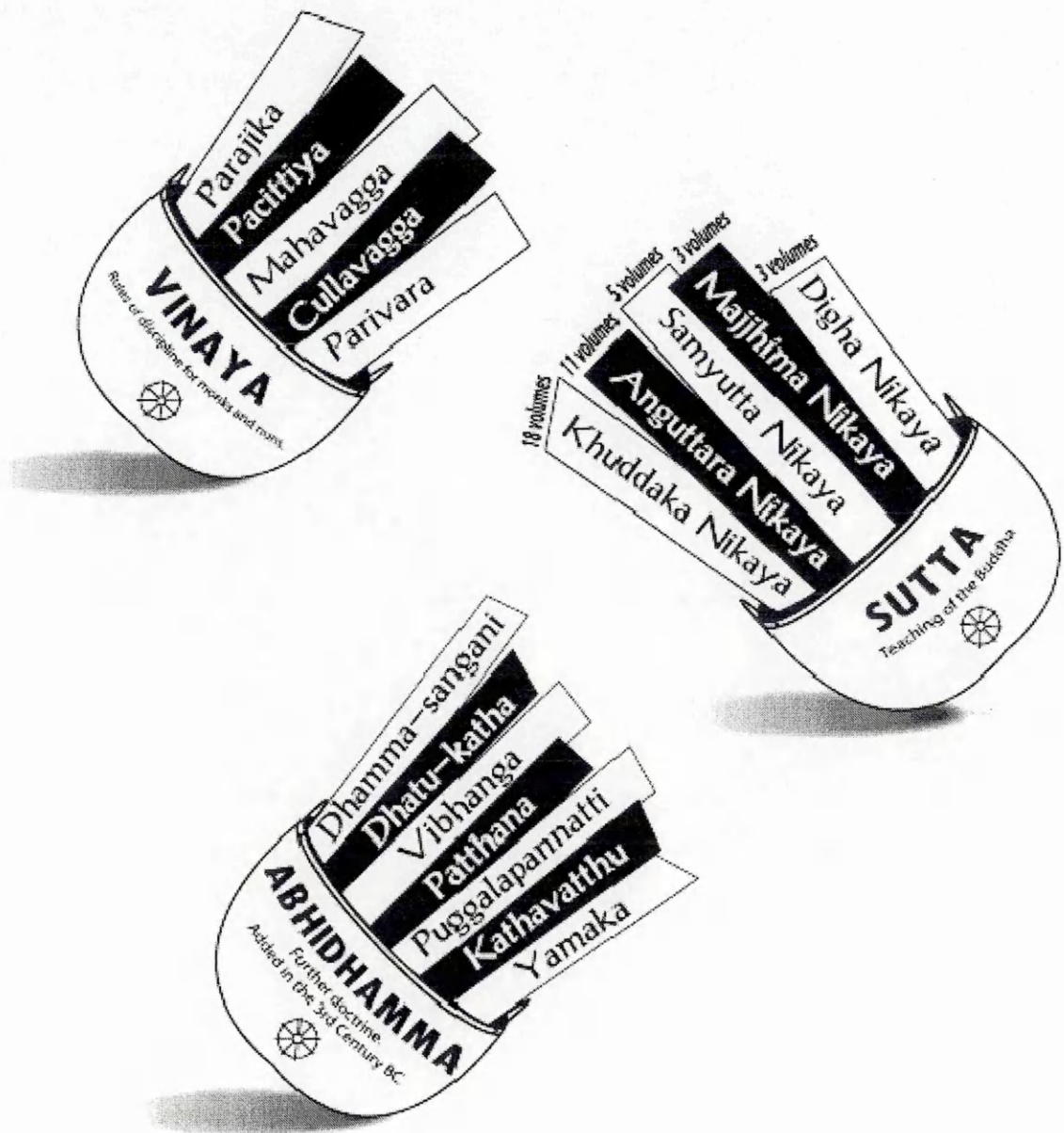
Evidently *nibbāna* can be experienced in this life. The Buddha and the *arahant* do not die a physical death on reaching enlightenment. In this world *nibbāna* is ‘the blowing out of the flame of desire’. The *arahant* is living in another dimension, free from *dukkha*.¹⁰⁹ *Nibbāna*, like the Kingdom of God, in its ‘after death’ realization, has to be taken on trust. It has to be considered as another dimension, beyond human comprehension.

¹⁰⁷ The Buddha gave a simile about helping a man pierced by a poisoned arrow to show how foolish such arguments were. If the man refused to let the doctor take the arrow out until he knew everything about the arrow, he would soon die. *Majjhima Nikāya* II (1957), 429.

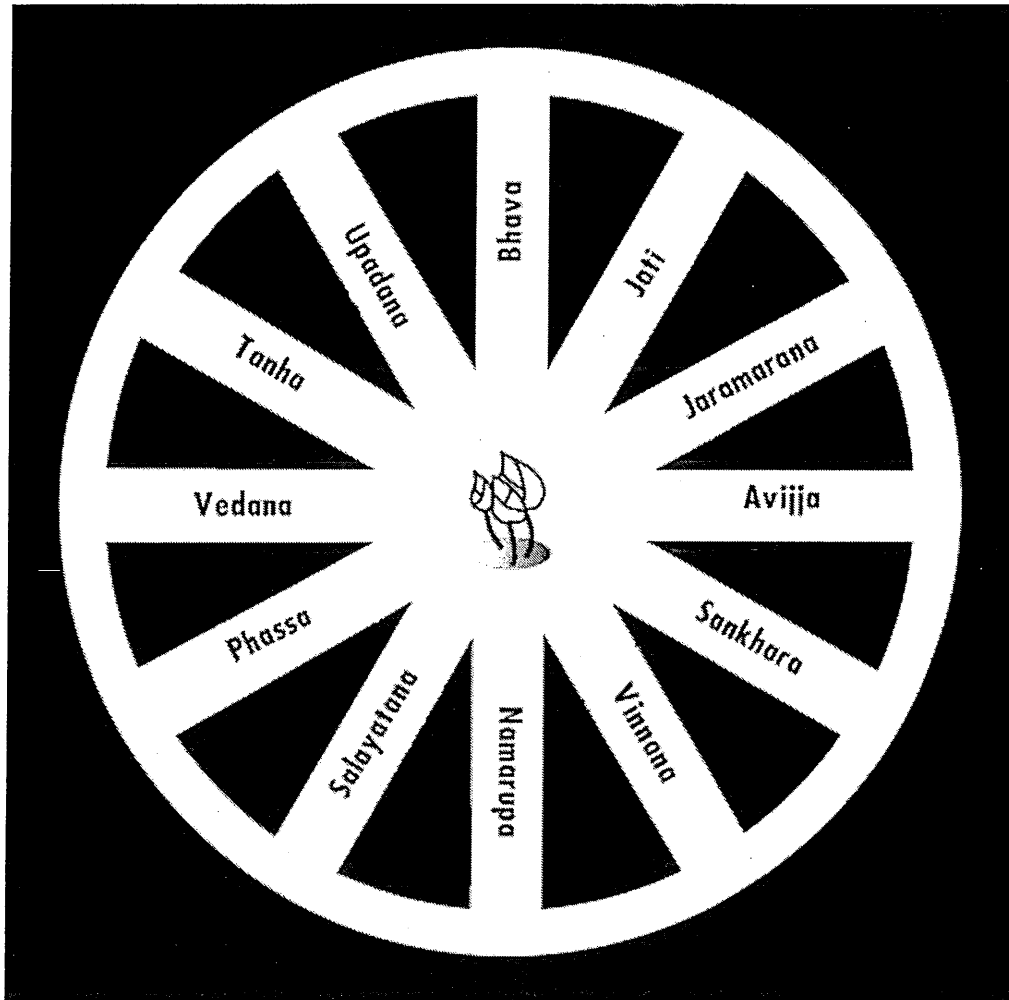
¹⁰⁸ Chandrkaew (1982), 160.

¹⁰⁹ Harvey (2002), 67.

Appendix Three: The *Tipitaka*



Appendix Four: The *paṭiccasamuppāda*



avijjā : ignorance

saṅkhāra : constructing activities , volitional Impulses (actions, speech, thoughts)

viññāṇa : consciousness - six fold of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind

nāmarūpa : name-and-form, the five aggregates or *khandhas* constituting individual existence

saḷāyatana: the six bases of sense impressions (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind)

phassa : sense contact (sight, hearing, taste, smell, touch, and mind or consciousness)

vedanā : feelings resulting from sense impressions (Pleasure, Pain and Indifference)

taṇhā : craving

upādāna : grasping, attachment

bhava : coming into being

jāti : birth conditioned by *bhava*

jarāmaraṇa : aging and death

Appendix Five : Thai Christian Leaders' view

5.1) The questionnaire presented to the Thai Christian Leaders

- 1) As a Christian, what is your ultimate goal in life?
- 2) What is your ultimate spiritual goal? (life after death)?
- 3) If the ultimate goal in life for a Buddhist is to enter *nibbāna*, what do you think is the ultimate goal in life for a Christian?
- 4) Could you give me a definition of the kingdom of God? Please explain the meaning of the phrase, 'the kingdom of God'
- 5) What does the kingdom of God mean to you.? Personally?
- 6) How does the kingdom of God have an effect on or relate to your daily life?
- 7) How do you feel the kingdom of God impacts or relates to your congregation as a whole?
- 8) How do you feel the kingdom of God impacts or relates to the Thai society?
- 9) A) Would you make a distinction between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven?
B) If so, how do they differ?
- 10) Could you give me a definition of 'eternal life'? Please explain the meaning of 'eternal life'.
- 11) How does 'eternal life' relate to 'the kingdom of God'? or 'the kingdom of heaven'?
- 12) Should Thai Christians make an effort to study Buddhism? Why/ Why not?
- 13) What do you think dialogue means?

14) Should Thai Christians make an effort to dialogue with Buddhists? Why/ Why not?

15) I would like your opinion on the importance of the following:

		Most important	Important	Not important	Somewhat time wasting	Extremely time wasting
A	The study of Buddhism					
B	Dialogue with Buddhists					
C	Christians to engage in social problems					
D	Christians to engage in politics					
E	Christians to engage in environmental concerns					
F	Christians to engage in evangelizing					
G	Christians to engage in social justice					

16) Please rank the topics in order of priority from the highest to the lowest

		1 st Highest	2 nd Priority	3 rd Priority	4 th Priority	5 th Priority	6 th Priority	7 th Lowest
A	The study of Buddhism							
B	Dialogue with Buddhists							
C	Christians to engage in social problems							
D	Christians to engage in politics							
E	Christians to engage in environmental concern							
F	Christians to engage in evangelizing							
G	Christians to engage in social justice							

- 17) There are more confrontations and pressures between religions in Thai society. As Christians are only a small minority in Thailand, what role do you think Thai Christians should take and how should they respond to confrontations and pressures between Christianity and Buddhism in modern day Thai society ?
- 18) Are you willing to disclose your name in the thesis?
- 19) Respondent name, position and organization/institute

5.2) Respondent profile

1. Ordained Leader	<u>23</u>	Lay Leader	<u>10</u>
2. Area of work			
	Bible College & Seminary		<u>5</u>
	Church		<u>19</u>
	Christian Organization*		<u>8</u>
	Retired		<u>1</u>
	(* Payap University, Bible Society etc)		
3. Education			
	Ph.D.	<u>5</u>	
	DTh.	<u>4</u>	
	DMin.	<u>7</u>	
	MDiv.	<u>10</u>	
	MA.	<u>2</u>	
	BTh.	<u>5</u>	
	Where Educated		
	USA	<u>17</u>	
	UK	<u>2</u>	
	Thailand	<u>10</u>	
	Other	<u>4</u>	
4. Personal			
	Male	<u>30</u>	Female <u>3</u>

5.3) Tabled responses

Total of 60 questionnaires distributed

Total of 33 responses received

A) Perception of importance

		Most important	Important	Not important	Somewhat time wasting	Extremely time wasting
A	The study of Buddhism	7	14	11		
B	Dialogue with Buddhists	7	7	15	3	
C	Christians to engage in social problems	24	8			
D	Christians to engage in politics	14	14	4	1	
E	Christians to engage in environmental concerns	18	12	1	1	
F	Christians to engage in evangelizing	30	3			
G	Christians to engage in social justice	21	9	2		

B) Perception of priority

		1 st Highest	2 nd Priority	3 rd Priority	4 th Priority	5 th Priority	6 th Priority	7 th Priority
A	The study of Buddhism	1	2	1	3	4	17	3
B	Dialogue with Buddhists		1	1	1	3	5	21
C	Christians to engage in social problems	3	13	10	4	1		
D	Christians to engage in politics			4	8	12	3	3
E	Christians to engage in environmental concern		1	7	11	6	3	2
F	Christians to engage in evangelizing	27	1	3	1			
G	Christians to engage in social justice		10	10	3	7	1	

Appendix six : Thai Christian understanding of the kingdom of God

The writer shall represent a Thai Christian describing his views of 'the Kingdom of God'¹ and discuss areas where others' opinions differ from his. For ease of discussion the kingdom of God will mostly be used, as there is no distinction between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven.²

The understanding of the kingdom of God has developed through time.³ It is very closely associated with Jesus Christ and his followers. Wherever Jesus is, there the kingdom is revealed in his words and deeds. Jesus called for repentance and proclaimed that the kingdom of God was at hand.⁴ The cross, resurrection and ascension shed a new light on the understanding of the kingdom.⁵ Jesus' physical presence was replaced by the presence of the Holy Spirit. The significance of the cross, resurrection and ascension and how they relate to the kingdom, needed to be developed as they are revealed through the Holy Spirit. Thus the kingdom was seen from a different angle. For each of four key aspects, the writer's view will be presented followed by a discussion of the Thai Christian leaders' views:

A) The kingdom of God is not geographical or territorial, and is not limited to space or time.⁶

It refers to God's supreme rule, exercised through Jesus Christ – the Messiah⁷ :

¹ This is an appropriate task for a Thai, and sixth generation descendent of one of the first Christian converts in Thailand. The writer's ancestors were Thai Christian leaders who were closely involved in the development of the Thai Protestant church. Family members of his father's generation still are. Because of limitations of space, he does not attempt detailed discussion of current debate among western New Testament scholars, though his views are in fact broadly similar to mainstream western views.

² The kingdom of God is found in Mark, Luke and Acts whereas the kingdom of heaven in Matthew, as some scholars assert, to avoid saying or writing the Divine Name (YHWH). See Reid (2004), 641; also Duling (1992), 49-69.

³ See Chilton (1996); Beasley-Murray (1986); Wright (1996).

⁴ Mark 1: 14-15, 12: 34; Matthew 4: 17, 23, 9: 35, 12:28, 21: 31-32; Luke 4 :43,10:8-9.

⁵ Küng (1981), 88.

⁶ Chilton (1996), 56 -73.

The concept referred to that commanding and all-consuming divine activity and was articulated to cope with the questions inherent in the very notion that God is King. ... God's rule would be along the coordinates of eschatology, transcendence, judgment, purity, and radiance.⁸

The Thai Christian leaders surveyed, both Catholic and Protestant, understood the kingdom of God to be the sovereignty of God, God's divine and kingly rule, the realm that God rules over with the highest authority.⁹ Thai Christian leaders perceive God's rule as just, loving, peaceful, and bringing happiness.

B) The kingdom of God is expressed in relationship, for entrance and membership. The relationship is one of trust and obedience to God.¹⁰ The basic entrance qualification is to be born from above – born of the spirit.¹¹ Understanding of entry into the kingdom and discipleship under God's rule is developed by the early church in various ways after the death and resurrection of Jesus.¹² Entering God's kingdom, one has to confess 'Jesus is Lord', be baptized in the name of Jesus, and show evidence of the Holy Spirit in one's life.¹³ The significance of baptism is explained as being united in Christ's death and resurrection,¹⁴ with the consequence of becoming members of the kingdom, by God's grace and through the blood of Christ, saved from sin and death¹⁵ to righteousness and eternal life, freed from sin to be God's instruments of righteousness,¹⁶ forgiven - washed clean, sanctified and justified,¹⁷

⁷ John 18:36; Luke 22:28-30 ; 1 Corinthians 15: 24-27 ; 1 Peter 3: 21-22 ; Revelation 11:15; see also Beasley-Murray (1986), 146, 283-312.

⁸ Chilton (1996), 56.

⁹ Expressed as: God rules as king to be obeyed, to follow his will; God is the owner of one's life; under God's rule or God's authority; God has the ultimate power.

¹⁰ Luke 8:21; John 5:30, 6:38.

¹¹ John 3: 3, 5-8.

¹² What the early church developed is in continuity with Jesus' teaching but expressed differently.

¹³ Acts 2:21, 38; Romans 10: 9 – 10.

¹⁴ Romans 6:3-5.

¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 15: 50-57.

¹⁶ Romans 6:6, 11-14.

¹⁷ Colossians 1:13-14; 1 Corinthians 6: 11; Romans 6:22-23.

and considered as heirs of the kingdom or children of God.¹⁸ Doing God's will is expressed as having the mind of Christ, no longer being self-centred but Christ-centred, and living in 'godliness and righteousness'¹⁹ by being obedient and guided by the Spirit.²⁰ There must be a relationship with Jesus for any comprehension of the kingdom to occur.²¹ 'To enter the kingdom of God' is in fact to have eternal life. Eternal life is the life God has and shares with us when we enter into relationship with Him. John's gospel uses the term 'eternal life' rather than the more exclusively Jewish concept of 'kingdom of God' or 'heaven'.²² St Paul also uses the expression – 'eternal life',²³ To have eternal life in fact is to know God and to know Jesus.²⁴

For the Thai leaders, God took the initiative. By God's grace and love, Jesus died on the cross for humankind's sins. Each person has to receive or reject Christ to be his/her saviour. Hence the moment the believer accepts Christ and is baptised, s/he is cleansed from sin (sanctified) and thus reconciled to God. S/he receives God's gift of eternal life, entering His kingdom in the here-and-now. Confessing that Jesus is Lord means accepting and believing that Jesus is God's only Son who was crucified, died and rose from the dead (was resurrected), lived and taught his disciples before ascending to heaven. Jesus will come again (his second coming) to judge the world and fully bring in his kingdom. One enters the kingdom of God, submits to God ruling one's life, no longer doing what one wants but doing His will. In His kingdom, under His rule, obedience flows from love. Moreover, only the love of Jesus is sufficient to sustain a life of obedience and discipleship, the secret of

¹⁸ Galatians 3:26-29; Romans 8:15-17; Mark 10:14-15; Matthew 18: 3, 4; Luke 18:16-17; Beasley-Murray (1986), 182.

¹⁹ Matthew 5:2, 13:41-43.

²⁰ 1 Thessalonians 4:7-8; Galatians 2:19-20, 5: 22-2; 1 Peter 4:2; Philippians 2:3-8 1; Corinthians 6: 19-20; John 14:15-17; Beasley-Murray (1986), 83.

²¹ Mark 4:10-12; Matthew 13:11.

²² John 3: 14-16, 5:24.

²³ 1 Timothy 1: 15-16.

²⁴ John 17:3, 12:49-50.

Christian obedience which redeems it from legalism or cold duty. It proceeds from a relationship of love with God. It is love which obeys God's will not out of sullen fear but with joyful gratitude. Because God first loved us and sent his Son to die for us, the Thai Christians' automatic response is to be *katanyu*.²⁵

Eternal life does not mean that the Christian does not die but that sin and Satan no longer take hold of the believer's life. He/she lives in union with God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit). Eternal life is a life of perfection as God intended it to be. Some leaders describe it as peace, joy, happiness, bliss. The peace of God is more than simply the absence of war, noise or strife. The joy of God is more than simply the absence of sadness or momentary happiness. The peace and joy of the Lord is the entire well-being of life under God's blessing. It includes many outer blessings but it survives the loss of them too. It is a peace that the world cannot give or take away.²⁶ When Christians die, they will be with God their Creator (in His kingdom) for eternity.²⁷ The majority of the leaders call this realm, where God is with his people who have been reconciled to Him and have passed away from this life, heaven.

C) The kingdom of God is both established²⁸ and yet not perfected but developing.²⁹ It is yet to come at the parousia, an eschatological aspect.³⁰ There is an ongoing tension of the here-and-now and the yet to come. We are now of limited understanding.³¹ The kingdom of God

²⁵ A response of love and grateful indebtedness to someone to whom one owes a great deal such as one's life.

²⁶ It is a deep peace with God that knows that all will be well, all manner of things will be well, and the deep joy that results from it.

²⁷ There were three leaders who distinguished between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven perceiving that the kingdom of heaven was the kingdom of God in heaven.

²⁸ Luke 11:2, 13: 28-29, 22:16 ; Matthew 6:10, 8: 11-12, 26:29 ; Mark 14:25.

²⁹ Only when the kingdom of God is fully grown is its full potential and impact realized. Matthew 13: 31-33 ; Mark 4: 26-27, 30-32.

³⁰ Mark 9:1, 13:26; Matthew 16:28, 24:30, 25:1-13; Luke 21:27-28, 31; John 14:3; Rev 21:1 and see Beasley-Murray (1986), 313-337.

³¹ 1 Corinthians 13: 9 - 12.

is so valuable it is to be striven for at all costs.³² It faces supernatural powers which are variously named as Satan, the tempter, the devil, the Evil one or what Jesus calls 'the kingdom of Satan'.³³ The continual battle between Jesus and Satan continues until the end of time though Jesus already has victory in his hands.³⁴ It can be deduced that hell, the opposite of the kingdom of God, is separation from Jesus and the Kingdom. Hell is where there is no longer any relationship with God.³⁵

For the Thai leaders, the kingdom of God in the world here-and-now is not at its perfection but it will be at the second coming of Christ. What is seen or experienced of the kingdom now is just a shadow. Christians need to depend on God's forgiveness every day and allow the Holy Spirit to gradually change them to become more and more like Christ, to transform the shadow to reality. The Holy Spirit is God's way of being present with us, making our life and work continuous with Jesus' life and work. It is important to realise that the Spirit is Person and not just an influence or a power. The Holy Spirit is working in and through the life of Christians.

D) Members of the kingdom of God in the here-and-now, also known as 'the church', are to play different roles³⁶ and are called to be worthy followers of Christ³⁷, living in unity³⁸ and proclaiming his kingdom³⁹, warning others of the judgment to come.⁴⁰ The Kingdom of God

³² Matthew 5: 29-30, 6:33, 13:44-46, 18:8-9; Luke 12: 29-31; Mark 9: 45-48; Philippians 3:8-9; Beasley-Murray (1986), 111-113.

³³ Mark 3:22ff.

³⁴ Matthew 4:3-11, 6:13, 12:26; Luke 4:13; John 17:152; Thessalonians 1:5-10; Beasley-Murray (1986), 108-111.

³⁵ Beasley-Murray (1986), 175.

³⁶ Romans 12:4.

³⁷ 1 Corinthians 6: 9-11; Ephesians 4:22-24, 4:32-5:2, 5:51; Thessalonians 2:12; Colossians 3:12.

³⁸ Ephesians 4:2; Romans 14:17.

³⁹ Matthew 24: 14, 28: 18-20; 2 Timothy 4:1-2 ; 2 Corinthians 5: 17-19.

⁴⁰ Chilton (1996), 74-80.

has political, economic, social, and ethical dimensions,⁴¹ with no division between the spiritual and the physical.

For the Thai leaders, Christians are to allow Christ's love to fill their hearts and to let it overflow to others. The best thing a Christian can do out of love is to bring others to Christ so they too may experience for themselves the love of Christ and his forgiveness and enter God's kingdom. They too will experience a new way of life, an eternal life. They will experience God's kingdom in the here-and-now and in the life after death. Most Thai Christian leaders perceive that the kingdom of God is neither physical nor territorial but of the spiritual realm. Some perceive that the kingdom of God began with Jesus Christ's incarnation, some at creation.⁴² A minority⁴³ perceive that the rule of God is not merely in the spiritual realm but that it includes the whole of creation. For this minority, the kingdom of God does not merely cover the spiritual aspects but the physical as well. Hence God's rule extends over economic, social and environmental concerns. So, as members of the kingdom, their responsibilities include these concerns. However, the majority perceive that their responsibilities lie only in bringing others to the kingdom. Once the majority of a society are members of the kingdom, they believe all the problems will be resolved as a consequence. Thus the emphasis for the majority of Thai Christian leaders is on evangelising and worldly concerns are secondary.

On reading the Thai Protestant pastors' understanding of the kingdom, we need to recall the historical outline of chapter two. Apart from the Roman Catholic Church, 'established' churches with clear connections between Church and State are hardly represented. Thailand was not colonized as India, Malaysia or Myanmar were, hence the Anglican, Episcopal and

⁴¹ Luke 4:18-19 ; Matthew 17:24-27 , 19:16ff , 22:17-21; Luke 12:13-21; James 2: 5, 9, 15-17; Romans 13:1-7.

⁴² Four respondents out of thirty-three.

⁴³ Four respondents out of thirty-three.

Lutheran churches played no significant part. There has been little link seen between church and state. The major Protestant player was the Presbyterian church of the U.S.A. and the theology taught has been Calvinist. The pastors appear to be understanding God's special grace to them and the elect while overlooking God's general grace to all men. Roman Catholics and Protestants have been receiving very different treatments vis-a-vis the state. The Roman Catholics have had recognized legal existence since 1910.⁴⁴ The Protestants with their various and fragmented views have not achieved individual legal status even in the twenty-first century.⁴⁵ This lack places emphasis on the spiritual side of the kingdom.

⁴⁴ See chapter two.

⁴⁵ This works out in practice that when a Protestant group grows so as to own property (land, car, buildings, etc.) the property has to be put in the names of individual church members or a secular 'foundation' established with the names of church members as its board. When time and temptation come along the church can lose its property. This is not an uncommon occurrence.

SELECTED GLOSSARY

All terms are Pali unless otherwise indicated: S = Sanskrit; T = Thai. The Thai text is given in the second column and in brackets for ease of reference and accuracy as most of the primary source material is written in Thai. Most definitions are taken from Payutto's *Dictionary of Buddhism*.

<i>Abhidhammapiṭaka</i>	พระอภิธรรมปิฎก	Third section of the Pali canon (doctrine & ethics) consists of seven books. The <i>Abhidhamma</i> Texts were added in the 3rd Century BC, aiming to present the teachings of the <i>Suttas</i> . The 7 Texts in 12 volumes are : 1) <i>Dhamma-sangani</i> (ธัมมสังคณี) - Enumeration / Classification of <i>Dhamma</i> ; 2) <i>Dhatu-katha</i> (ธาตุกถา) - Discourse on Elements; 3) <i>Vibhanga</i> (วิภังค) - Book of Analysis/ Divisions; 4) <i>Patthana</i> (ปฏฐาน) - Book of Causal Relations; 5) <i>Puggalaparinatti</i> (บุคคลบัญญัติ) - The Book on Individuals; 6) <i>Kathavatthu</i> (กถาวัตถุ) - Points of Controversy; 7) <i>Yamaka</i> (ยมก) - The Book of Pairs.
<i>abyakata</i>	อัปยาคต	unanswerables.
<i>ahimsā</i>	อหิงสา	non-violence; non-harming; inoffensiveness; non-injury.
<i>akusala</i>	อกุศล	unskillful; demeritorious; immoral; karmically unwholesome; as a noun :demerit; bad action; opposite of <i>kusala</i> .
<i>amṛta, amata</i> (T)	อมตะ	deathlessness; immortality.
<i>anattā</i>	อนัตตา	not a self; having no permanent substratum or soul, soulless.
<i>anicca, anijjang</i> (T)	อนิขขา, อนิจจัง	impermanence; impermanent, transient.
<i>ānisaṃsa , anisrong</i> (T)	อานิสงส์	merit, profit, good result, advantage.
<i>anusaya</i>	อนุสัย	proclivities; latent tendencies.
<i>anusayakilesa</i>	อนุสัยกิเลส	the defilements.
<i>arahant</i>	อรหันต์	Worthy one; saint; one who has attained <i>nibbāna</i> .

ariya-aṭṭhaṅgika

อริยอัฏฐังคิกมรรค

-maggathe Noble Eightfold Path, or *ariyamagga*:

- 1) *sammādiṭṭhi* (สัมมาทิฏฐิ) - **right view**, salvific vision of reality;
- 2) *sammāsaṅkappa* (สัมมาสังกัปปะ) - **right thought**, organisation of thought in a manner conducive to liberation;
- 3) *sammāvācā* (สัมมาวาจา) - **right speech**, morally correct use of speech;
- 4) *sammākammanta* (สัมมากัมมันตะ) - **right action**, morally correct activity;
- 5) *sammājīva* (สัมมาอาชีวะ) - **right livelihood**, morally correct means of earning a living;
- 6) *sammāvāyāma* (สัมมาวายามะ) - **right effort**, ascetically conducive use of one's energy;
- 7) *sammāsati* (สัมมาสติ) - **right mindfulness** or introspection;
- 8) *sammāsamādhi* (สัมมาสมาธิ) - **right concentration** or gathering of the mind.

Right speech, action and livelihood is grouped as *sīla*. Right effort, mindfulness and concentration is grouped as *samādhi*. Right view, and thought is grouped as *paññā*. These three grouping is also known as *trisikkha* (ไตรสิกขา).

ariyamagga

อริยมรรค

the 'noble path'; the four stages of sanctification on the way to *nibbāna*:

- 1) *Sotāpanna magga* (โสดาปัตติมรรค) ,
- 2) *Sakadāgāmin magga* (สกทาคามีมรรค) ,
- 3) *Anāgāmin magga* (อนาคามีมรรค) ,
- 4) *Arahant magga* (อรหัตตมรรค).

ariyapol

อริยผล

the four noble fruits; the fruits received at the four stages of sanctification to *nibbāna*. They are from the lowest to the highest level :

- 1) *Sotāpatthipol* (โสดาปัตติผล),
- 2) *Sakadāgānipol* (สกทาคามีผล),
- 3) *Anāgānipol* (อนาคามีผล),
- 4) *Arahantpol* (อรหัตตผล).

ariyapuggala

อริยบุคคล

noble person, the stages of the sanctified person on the way to *nibbāna*. They are from the lowest to the highest level:

- 1) *Phra-sotāpanna* (พระโสดาบัน) - The stream-entrant : At this stage the first three of ten fetters which are said to bind us to our state of ignorance must be broken. These fetters are: belief in a self, doubt about the Buddha or his teaching, and

		reliance on good works or ceremonies to deliver us from our existential problems.
		2) <i>Phra-sakadāgāmi</i> (พระสกทาคามี) - The once-returner : The power of two more fetters - lust and hate must be greatly reduced. The <i>Sakadāgāmin</i> is so far advanced towards perfection that the <i>Sakadāgāmin</i> may be expected to be reborn into this world only once more.
		3) <i>Phra-anāgāmi</i> (พระอนาคามี) - The non-returner: The <i>Anāgāmin</i> is entirely liberated from the first five fetters and will not be reborn in our world. If the <i>Anāgāmin</i> is born again, it will be in a special 'Brahma world' and not in any mere terrestrial or heavenly realm.
		4) <i>Phra-arahant</i> (พระอรหันต์) - The worthy: The remaining five fetters (desire for life in the realm of form, desire for life in the formless realm, pride, restlessness, and ignorance) are totally destroyed. The <i>arahant</i> is one who has attained <i>nibbāna</i> .
<i>ariyasacca</i>	อริยสัจจ์	the Four Noble Truths :
		1) <i>Dukkha</i> (ทุกข์) - suffering,
		2) <i>Samudaya</i> (สมุทัย) - the origin of suffering,
		3) <i>Nirodha</i> (นิโรธ) - cessation of suffering,
		4) <i>Magga</i> (มรรค) - the path to end suffering.
<i>asannkhata-dhamma</i>	อสังขตธรรม	highest spiritual teaching.
<i>āsava</i>	อาสวะ	mental intoxication; canker (canker of sense-desire, canker of becoming, canker of views, canker of ignorance).
<i>attā , ātman (S)</i>	อัตตา, อาตมัน	the self; entity; soul.
<i>attawaht</i>	อัตตวาท	egoism, clinging to the self .
<i>avijjā</i>	อวิชชา	ignorance (opposite of <i>vijjā</i> - knowledge or truth); without knowledge; the 1 st stage of <i>paṭiccasamuppāda</i> .
<i>bap (T), pāpa</i>	บาป	evil; wrong action; demerit (opposite of <i>boon</i>); sin (Payutto's <i>Dictionary of Buddhism</i> indicated using <i>bap</i> for sin as misleading).
<i>benjadhamma (T)</i>	เบญจธรรม	the five ennobling virtues; virtues enjoined by the five precepts, they are:
<i>pañcadhamma</i>		1) <i>mettā-karuṇā</i> (เมตตากรุณา): loving kindness and compassion - paired with the 1st precept
		2) <i>sammāājīva</i> (สัมมาอาชีวะ): right means of livelihood or <i>dāna</i> (ทาน): giving, generosity - paired with the 2nd precept

benjakhandā (T)

เบญจขันธ์

pañcupādānak-**khandha**

3) *kāmasamvara* (กามสังวร): sexual restraint or *sadārasantosa* (สทธารสันโดษ) : contentment with one's own wife - paired with the 3rd precept

4) *sacca* (สัจจะ): truthfulness, sincerity - paired with the 4th precept

5) *satisampajañña* (สติสัมปชัญญะ): mindfulness and awareness, temperance or *appamāda* (อัปปมาท): heedfulness - paired with the 5th precept.

the composition of an individual, also known as the five-fold aggregates. They are:

1) *rūpa* (รูป): form, corporeality

2) *vedanā* (เวทนา): feeling, sensation

3) *saññā* (สัญญา): perception

4) *saṅkhāra* (สังขาร): mental formations, volitional activities

5) *viññāṇa* (วิญญาณ): consciousness

In short, an individual being is composed of two parts: form (*rūpa*) and name (*nāma* - นาม). Name covers the last four aggregates. See also *khandā*.

the five precepts or prohibitions; rules of morality, they are:

1) *pāṇātipātā veramaṇi* : to abstain from killing

2) *adinnādānā veramaṇi* : to abstain from stealing

3) *kāmesumicchācārā veramaṇi*: to abstain from sexual misconduct

4) *musāvādā veramaṇi* : to abstain from false speech, lie, saying what is not true

5) *surāmerayamajjapamādaṭṭhānā veramaṇi* : to abstain from intoxicants causing heedlessness, not use addictive substance.

benjasila (T)

เบญจศีล

pañcasila**bhava**

ภพ

coming into being; Becoming, conditions leading to birth. (meritorious, demeritorious, and imperturbable) ; The three states of existence are conventionally enumerated as *kāma* (กาม) - sensual, *rūpa* (รูป) - corporeal, and *arūpa* (อรูป) - formless;

10th stage of *pañcasamuppāda*

bhavaṅga,

ภวังค์

phawangkha (T)

life-continuum; the subliminal consciousness; constituent of becoming; the passive state of mind; functional state of subconscious-ness.

bhikkhu	ภิกขุ	Male monk; mendicant; one who has renounced the lay life to become a disciple of the Buddha.
boon (T), puñña	บุญ	merit; good works; virtue; opposite of <i>bap</i> .
brahmacariya, brahmacariyam, prohmmajan (T)	พรหมจรรย์	holy/religious life; sublime life; brahma-faring; celibate/chaste life; one who leads a holy life, particularly of chastity; life lived in accordance with <i>dhamma</i> .
brahmavihāra 4	พรหมวิหาร 4	(the four) Divine states (of mind): <i>mettā, karuṇā, mudītā, upekkhā</i> ; also known as <i>appamaññā</i> .
cakkattin, cakkavatti	จักรกัปปัตติ, พระเจ้าจักรพรรดิ	one who turns the wheel of the law; universal monarch.
cetana	เจตนา	volitional activity; intention; thinking in relation to action.
chart (T)	ชาติ	nation; lifetime.
citta, jñ (T)	จิต	thought; mind; a state of consciousness.
dāna, tharn (T)	ทาน	giving; generosity, gift offered to monks.
devatā, thewada (T)	เทวดา	spirit-beings, angels, celestial or heavenly beings, deity.
dhamma, dharma (S), tham (T)	ธรรม	salvific truth; Buddha's doctrine; the law of truth.
dhammadhiṭṭhāna	ธรรมาธิษฐาน	exposition in terms of elements or concepts based upon insight into the truth of <i>anattā</i> .
Dhammapada	ธรรมบท	verses on <i>dhamma</i> found in the <i>Suttapiṭaka, Khuddiaka Nikaya</i> .
Dhammayuttika, Thammayut (T)	ธรรมยุติ	The denomination founded by King Rama IV.
Digha-nikāya	ทีฆนิกาย	The first collection of sutras in the <i>Tipiṭaka</i> .
dukkha, dukkang (T)	ทุกข์, ทุกข์	suffering; misery; hollow, unsatisfactoriness; meaninglessness or emptiness of existence, ending in death.
dosa	โทสะ	hatred; ill-will; aggressiveness; anger; aversion.
Gotama	โคตมะ, โกตมะ	the family name of Buddha.
jarāmarāṇa	ชรา มรณะ	aging and death; The breaking up of the <i>khandas</i> and the sense bases; 12 th stage of <i>paṭiccasamuppāda</i> .

<i>jāti</i>	ชาติ	birth conditioned by <i>bhava</i> , the arising of the <i>khandas</i> and the sense bases; 11 th stage of <i>paṭīccasamuppāda</i> .
<i>jīti</i> (T)	จิต	see <i>citta</i> .
<i>jītiwang</i> (T)	จิตว่าง	mind set free; freed-mind; mind without moral impurities; a mind peaceful and imperturbable.
<i>jhāna</i> <i>yan</i> (T)	ฌาน	trance; absorption; state of mental absorption often a part of the conventional formula of four or eight levels e.g. <i>arupa-jhāna</i> (อรูปฌาน): immaterial states of mental absorption, <i>rupa-jhāna</i> (รูปฌาน): material states of mental absorption.
<i>kaaphrachao</i> (T)	ข้าพเจ้า	I (There are several forms for the pronoun 'I' in Thai. The one used depends on the speaker's relationship to the person addressed).
<i>kāma</i>	กาม, กามา	desire; pleasure; sense enjoyment.
<i>kamma, karma</i> (S) <i>kam</i> (T)	กรรม	a volitional action; moral action; moral retribution; intentional deed action; the law of cause and effect; fate.
<i>kataññī</i> , <i>katanyu</i> (T)	กตัญญู	grateful; obliging; knowing the done favour; filial piety; normally used together with <i>katavedī</i> (กตเวทิตี) which means one who is thankful for benefits received and reciprocates them.
<i>karuṇā, karuna</i> (T)	กรุณา	compassion, pity, mercy, generally used in combination with <i>mettā</i> .
<i>khandas, skandhas</i> (S)	ขันธ์	aggregates, heaps, the constituent factors, There are five, see <i>benjakhanda</i> .
<i>khon</i> (T)	คน	human; person.
<i>Khuddaka Nikāya</i>	ขุททกนิกาย	one of the five <i>nikāya</i> in the <i>Suttapiṭaka</i> .
<i>kilesa</i>	กิเลส	defilement; mental impurities; impairments. Traditionally ten <i>kilesa</i> are enumerated:

- 1) *lobha* (โลก) – greed, attachment oriented;
- 2) *dosa* (โทสะ) – hatred, anger;
- 3) *moha* (โมหะ, หลง) - delusion (opposite of *pañña*);
- 4) *māna* (มานะ, ถือตัว) - conceit, pride, inordinate feeling, spiritual pride;
- 5) *diṭṭhi* (ทิฏฐิ-เห็นผิด) - false views;

		6) <i>vicikicchā</i> (วิจิกิจฉา-ลังเล, สงสัย) – scepticism, doubt;
		7) <i>thina</i> (ถีนะ-หคณฺ, ท้อแท้ใจ) – mental torpor, sloth, discouragement;
		8) <i>uddhacca</i> (อุทธัจจะ-ฟุ้งซ่าน) – mental restlessness;
		9) <i>ahirika</i> (อหิริกะ-ความไม่ละอายต่อความชั่ว) – shamelessness;
		10) <i>anottappa</i> (อโนตตัปปะ-ความไม่เกรงกลัวต่อความชั่ว) – a lack of a conscience or moral dread.
<i>kristang</i> (T)	คริสต์ตัง	Roman Catholic.
<i>kristian</i> (T)	คริสต์เตียน	Protestant Christian (Thais usually understood as any non- Roman Catholic Christian.
<i>kusala</i>	กุศล	wholesome; skilful; meritorious; moral; karmically wholesome; as a noun : merit; good action; virtue; the good; the happy and auspicious; wholesome action; opposite is <i>akusala</i> .
<i>lokiya</i>	โลกิย	mundane; worldly; belonging to the world; opposite of <i>lokuttara</i> .
<i>lokiyadhamma</i>	โลกิยธรรม	<i>dhamma</i> of the mundane, worldly; generally known as <i>dhamma</i> for the lay – morale.
<i>lokuttara, lokutra</i> (T)	โลกุตตระ	supramundane; transcendental; beyond these worlds
<i>lokuttaradhamma</i>	โลกุตตรธรรม	<i>dhamma</i> of the world renouncing, supramundane; generally known as <i>dhamma</i> for the monks; <i>Dhamma</i> of the higher level to enable one to reach <i>nibbāna</i> , assisting people to live beyond this world, not bound to this world, not clinging or holding on to it, even though they are still in this world.
<i>magga</i>	มรรค	path; way.
<i>mahatherasamakhom</i> (T)	มหาเถรสมาคม	council of elders/monks, ruling body for the Thai <i>Sangha</i>
<i>maggaphala, makpol</i> (T)	มรรคผล	the fruit of the Path.
<i>māyā</i>	มายา	illusion; the display of an illusion; trick; deceit; deception; delusion; a misapprehension of the true state of affairs; the faulty perception of an object; a false belief or impression.
<i>micchaasamadhi</i>	มิชฌาสมาธิ	wrong concentration.

<i>majjhimāpaṭipadā</i>	มัชฌิมาปฏิปทา	the middle path; the middle way.
<i>mettā, metta (T)</i>	เมตตา	loving-kindness; friendliness; goodwill, generally used in combination with <i>karuṇā</i> .
<i>moha</i>	โมหะ	delusion; dullness, slowness of mind; ignorance.
<i>mokkha, Moksa (T)</i>	โมกษะ	freedom ; salvation ; release; deliverance; liberation the state of disentanglement.
<i>nāmarūpa</i>	นามรูป	the five aggregates or <i>khandhas</i> constituting individual existence; 4 th stage of <i>paṭiccasamuppāda</i> .
<i>nibbāna, nirvāṇa (S), nīphan(T)</i>	นิพพาน	extinction; ultimate reality; absolute truth; blowing out; final state of release – from which there is no rebirth; final liberation; final perfect degree of emptiness <i>summum bonum</i> (latin- the highest or supreme good) ; Other words that have the same meaning as <i>nibbāna</i> are: วิมุตติ อสังขตะ สันติ วิสุทฺธิ วิวิญญู.
<i>nikaya, nikaay (T)</i>	นิกาย	denomination.
<i>paññā, panya (T)</i>	ปัญญา	wisdom; intellect; gnostic wisdom; knowledge - often regarded as higher or emancipating knowledge (<i>vimutta</i>).
<i>pañcadhamma</i>	เบญจธรรม	see <i>benjadhamma</i> .
<i>pañcasīla</i>	เบญจศีล	see <i>benjasila</i> .
<i>paramatthadesanā</i>	ปรมัตถเทศนา	teachings expressed in terms of the constitutive elements of existence or in terms of absolute truth .
<i>paramatthadhamma</i>	ปรมัตถธรรม	ultimate <i>dhamma</i> , ultimate meaning or benefit which is <i>nibbāna</i> . <i>Paramattha</i> means of the highest, greatest objective or benefit. <i>Paramatthadhamma</i> is considered as <i>lokuttaradhamma</i> .
<i>paramatthasacca</i>	ปรมัตถสัจจะ	absolute truth; ultimate truth.
<i>parinibbāna</i>	ปรินิพพาน	the highest form of <i>nibbāna</i> ; complete passing away; final release from samsaric existence; the passing away of <i>arahants</i> .
<i>pariyatti</i>	ปริยัติ	the scriptures; study of the scriptures ; the teachings to be studied.

<i>paṭiccasamuppāda</i>	ปฏิจจสมุปบาท	Dependent origination, also called <i>bhavacakka</i> (ภวัฏจักร), the cycle of becoming or the wheel of existence, conditioned co-genesis, traditionally consisting of twelve causally linked stages.
<i>paṭipadā, pathipatha (T)</i>	ปฏิบัติ	modes of progress to <i>nibbanā</i> (deliverance), path.
<i>paṭipatti</i>	ปฏิบัติ	the practice.
<i>paṭisandhi</i>	ปฏิสนธิ	conception; rebirth.
<i>paṭisandhivīññāṇa</i>	ปฏิสนธิวิญญาน	<i>paṭisandhi</i> consciousness; <i>bhavaṅga</i> at conception; rebirth consciousness.
<i>phasakhon</i>	ภาษาคคน	human or common, mundane language.
<i>phasatham</i>	ภาษาธรรม	<i>dhamma</i> , spiritual or religious language.
<i>phassa</i>	ผัสสะ	sense contact (sight, hearing, taste, smell, touch, and mind or consciousness). The sixth sense of consciousness has mental states or mental phenomena as its objects of contact; 6 th stage of <i>paṭiccasamuppāda</i> .
<i>phra (T)</i>	พระ	Buddhist monk.
<i>phrasangharaj (T)</i>	พระสังฆราชย์	Supreme patriarch, head of the Thai Sangha.
<i>puggaladhiṭṭhāna</i>	บุคคลาธิษฐาน	exposition of the doctrine in terms of persons or by personification.
<i>raga</i>	ราคะ	desire; greed; lust; passion; erotic, sensual; selfish love.
<i>Ratanakosin (T)</i>	รัตนโกสินทร์	period of the Chakri dynasty; alternative name for the Bangkok Era.
<i>sacca, sajja (T)</i>	สัจจะ	truth; truthfulness.
<i>saiyasart (T)</i>	ไสยศาสตร์	beliefs in spirits, mediums, amulets, and magic; animism; superstition; supernaturalism; occultism.
<i>saḷāyatana</i>	อายตนะ, สฬายตนะ	the six bases of sense impressions (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind); 5 th stage of <i>paṭiccasamuppāda</i> .
<i>samāpatti, samabat (T)</i>	สมาบัติ	attainment; meditative attainments.
<i>samādhi</i>	สมาธิ	concentration, calming, or tranquility meditation;
<i>samathi (T)</i>		concentration leading to altered states of consciousness; also known as <i>samātha</i>

<i>sammādiṭṭhi</i>	สัมมาทิฏฐิ	<i>bhāvanā, samātha kammaṭṭhāna.</i> right view; right understanding.
<i>sammatissacca</i>	สมมติสัจจะ	everyday or conventional truth.
<i>samparāyikattha</i>	สัมปรายิกัตถะ	gain for the hereafter ; further / future benefit; spiritual welfare / objective; sources of happiness in the future life.
<i>saṃsāra</i> <i>saṃsāric (adj)</i>	สังสารวัฏ, สงสาร	the cycle of rebirth and suffering; the world of birth, death and suffering; the unbroken chain or cycle of continual change – birth and re-birth; the wheel of rebirth/life; wandering on.
<i>saṃskāras</i>	สังสการะ	volitional forces; internal effect; internal disposition.
<i>samudaya</i>	สมุทัย	the origin of suffering; the second of the four noble truths.
<i>saṅgha, sangha (T)</i>	สงฆ์	the body of Buddhist monks in monastic communities following the Buddha's path.
<i>saṅkhāra</i>	สังขาร	mental 'formations' associated with volitional or <i>kamma</i> - creating actions; Volitional Impulses (Actions, Speech, Thoughts.); constructing activities, all formed things; 2nd stage of <i>paṭiccasamuppāda</i> .
<i>sasana (T)</i>	ศาสนา	religion; teaching/doctrine.
<i>sasatadiṭṭhi</i>	สัสสตทิฏฐิ	belief that there is an eternal self to be born again; eternalist doctrine.
<i>sati</i>	สติ	mindfulness.
<i>sa-upādisesanibbāna</i>	สอุปาทิเสสนิพพาน	<i>nibbāna</i> realized with the body remaining/with the substratum of life remaining.
<i>silā</i>	ศีล	rule; morality; moral precept; virtue.
<i>suññatā, sunyata (T)</i>	สุญญตา	emptiness; devoid of self.
<i>sutta, sutra</i>	สูตร	discourse of the Buddha.
<i>Suttapiṭaka</i>	สุตตันตปิฎก	the second of the Three Baskets, the Discourses or teachings of the Buddha. This basket is divided into five <i>Nikāyas</i> or Collections: 1) <i>Dīgha Nikāyas</i> (ทีฆนิกาย) - Collection of 34 'Long Discourses' in 3 volumes (นิบาต); 2) <i>Majjhima Nikāyas</i> (มัชฌิมนิกาย) - Collection of

		<p>152 'Middle-length Discourses' in 3 volumes;</p> <p>3) <i>Samyutta Nikāyas</i> (สังยุตตนิกาย) - Collection of 7,762 'Connected Discourses/Kindred Sayings' in 5 volumes;</p> <p>4) <i>Anguttara Nikāyas</i> (อังคุตตรนิกาย) - Collection of 9,775 Single-item Upwards Discourses/Gradual Sayings in 11 volumes;</p> <p>5) <i>Khuddaka Nikāyas</i> (ขุททกนิกาย) - Collection of 15 'Little Texts' (คัมภีร์) in 18 volumes.</p>
<i>taṇhā</i>	ตัณหา	<p>craving; sensual craving (กามตัณหา) for the six types of sensorily cognizable objects (of the six senses), craving for being (ภวตัณหา), craving for self-annihilation (วิภวตัณหา); 8th stage of <i>paṭiccasamuppāda</i>.</p>
<i>Theravāda</i> , (sometimes known as <i>Hinayana</i>)	เถรวาท, หินยาน	<p><i>Theravāda</i> or <i>Theravadins</i> (Adherents of the teaching of the Elders) were distinguished from the <i>Mahāyāna</i> (มหายาน the great vehicle) or <i>Mahāsaṅghikas</i> (members of the great <i>Saṅgha</i>) branch of Buddhism. The main doctrinal difference between the two groups is in the means of attaining Buddhahood. The <i>Theravāda</i> maintained that it was the fruit of strict observance of the rules whereas <i>Mahāyāna</i> holds that Buddhahood already dwells within, and only needs developing.</p>
<i>tilakkhaṇa, trilak(T)</i>	ไตรลักษณ์	<p>the three characteristics or signs of being. They are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) <i>aniccatā</i> (อนิจจตา)- impermanence, transiency, 2) <i>dukkhatā</i> (ทุกข์ตา)- state of suffering or being oppressed, 3) <i>anattatā</i> (อนัตตตา) - non-self.
<i>Tipiṭaka, Tripiṭaka (S), Traibidok (T)</i>	ไตรปิฎก	<p>literally, the 'Three Baskets' (Buddha's teaching originally inscribed on palm leaves and put into three baskets) of the Theravāda Buddhist Pali canon :</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) <i>Vinayaṭiṭaka</i> (วินัยปิฎก) Basket of Discipline consists of rules and discipline for monks, 2) <i>Suttaṭiṭaka</i> (สุตตันตปิฎก) Basket of Discourses of all the sermons and teachings of the Buddha and his disciples, 3) <i>Abhidhammaṭiṭaka</i> (อภิธรรมปิฎก) Basket of further doctrine & ethics.

Traibhumikatha, Traiphum (T)	ไตรภูมิ (พระร่วง)	The classical Buddhist world view recorded in the time of King Li-Thai with multi-levelled heavens earth and hells. Also known as Traiphum-phraruang.
Triple Gems	พระรัตนตรัย	The Buddha (พระพุทธ), the <i>dhamma</i> (พระธรรม), and the <i>sangha</i> (พระสงฆ์).
tuagoo-khonggoo (T)	ตัวกู - ของกู	I/ me- my/Mine.
upādāna	อุปาทาน	grasping; attachment or clinging to sensed objects, to views, to rules and practices, to the concept of self; 9 th stage of <i>paṭiccasamuppāda</i> .
upekkhā	อุเบกขา	mental equilibrium; wherein one is neither attracted to nor repelled by anyone or anything; indifference; neutral feeling - neither pleasurable nor painful feeling; equanimity.
upathi	อุปธิ	conditions that sustain suffering e.g. <i>benjakhanda</i> , <i>kilesa</i> .
vedanā	เวทนา	feelings resulting from sense impressions (Pleasure, Pain and Indifference); 7 th stage of <i>paṭiccasamuppāda</i> .
vijjā	วิชา	knowledge or truth.
vijjā 8	วิชา 8	eightfold knowledge: 1) <i>Vipassanāñāṇa</i> (วิปัสสนาญาณ) - insight knowledge 2) <i>Manomayiddhi</i> (มนโสมยิทธิ) - mind-made magical power 3) <i>Iddhividhā</i> (อิทธิวิธ) - super-normal powers 4) <i>Dibbasota</i> (ทิพโสต) - divine ear 5) <i>Cetopariyañāṇa</i> (เจโตปริยญาณ) - penetration of the minds of others 6) <i>Pubbenivāsānussati</i> (ปุพเพนิวาสานุสสติ) - remembrance of former existences 7) <i>Dibbacakkhu</i> (ทิพจักขุ) - divine eye 8) <i>āsavakkhayañāṇa</i> (อาสวักขยญาณ) - knowledge of the exhaustion of mental intoxicants.
vimutti	วิมุตติ	emancipation; liberation; deliverance; release/ freedom.
Vinayapiṭaka, Vinaya (T)	วินัยปิฎก	code of discipline; the first of the Three Baskets; This section/basket contains five books: 1) <i>Parajika</i> (ปาราชิก) (Major Offences); 2) <i>Pacittiya</i> (ปาจิตติย) (Minor Offences); 3) <i>Mahavagga</i> (มหาวรรค);

		4) <i>Cullavagga</i> (จุลวรรค); 5) <i>Parivara</i> (ปริวาร).
		Sometimes one and two are grouped together and are called <i>vipang</i> (วิกังค) containing the <i>patimok</i> (ปาฏิโมกข์) two hundred and twenty seven rules. Three and four are grouped together and called <i>khantaka</i> (ขันธกะ) containing rules outside the <i>patimok</i> .
<i>viññāṇa, vinyan (T)</i>	วิญญาณ	consciousness - six fold of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind; act of consciousness; 3 rd stage of <i>paṭiccasamuppāda</i> ; also part of the <i>benjakhanda</i> ; popular Thai meaning is 'soul or spirit' which Payutto's <i>Dictionary of Buddhism</i> indicated as misleading.
<i>vipāka</i>	วิบาก	Ripening; fruit; consequence; effect; result; reaction.
<i>vipassanā</i>	วิปัสสนา	insight meditation; meditation that leads to true understanding, salvation; intuitive vision; introspection/contemplation; also known as <i>vipassanābhāvanā</i> , <i>vipassanākammaṭṭhāna</i> .
<i>Visuddhimagga</i>	วิสุทธิมรรค	commentary on the Pali canon, written by Buddhaghosa (พระพุทธโฆษาจารย์) in the 5 th century C.E.
<i>vohāra</i>	โวหาร	conversations.
<i>vohāradesanā</i>	โวหารเทศนา	teachings expressed in conventional speech.
<i>wat (T)</i>	วัด	Buddhist temple.

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